

Beggars Can Choose

MARGARET WEYMOUTH JACKSON

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CHAPTER XIV
—23—

Will and Ernestine Choose

Will was nailing up a wooden box. The shelves and the table were empty. Ankle deep on the floor was a litter of papers.

"Ernestine!" He stopped, a hammer in hand, to stare at her.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed, and then, with a little cry of horror she stooped and picked up from the rubbish on the floor, a torn picture.

"Oh, Will, how could you tear it up? It was good—it was wonderful. Why did you destroy it?" With trembling hands she tried to put the ragged pieces together on the drafting desk. He looked at her astonished, voiceless. Before her, raked against the wall, was the sketch of herself, with Elaine on her arm.

"I'm glad you didn't throw this away—oh, Will, I like it so! But what are you doing? Are you moving?"

"What do you mean, Ernestine?" he said sharply. "Did you know about this office—when have you been here?"

"Of course I knew," she said impatiently, confused to find the need for explanations, now, at this vital hour. I've known you had this office, since last spring. I knew, long before that, that you were hankering for something—some new work. You remember the night you made this picture?" She picked up the sketch of herself. "You remember? Of course you do. I knew then, that you were working. Lillian had told me she saw you in this neighborhood, and I came here the next day, and looked at all your work. Oh, Will, don't look at me so! I wasn't spying on you! You were so strange, and I was very unhappy—I had to know what you were doing. But aren't you going to work here any more?"

He laughed strangely. "Rent's due tomorrow," he said. "I decided to let it go. I'm closing this office, and I'll never open another. I suppose, since you knew I was working here, that you were worried about the cats—but you needn't have worried—I'll stay with the job. I've given up my wild ideas. We'll keep the income—that's what counts."

"Why Will," she said swiftly, "you don't think there's any conflict between your desire and mine, do you? That's what I've been saving for—all this time. I knew that you would want to quit the cats, and I've saved a great deal of money—you'll be astonished. I had to know—it was right for me to know. It's made it possible for us to build a reserve. And why should I worry about the cats? Do you think I want you to stick to the cats, if there's something bigger, something more compelling upon you? Why, Will, Will—all I want is just what you want." Suddenly she remembered her errand, with a wall. "Oh, Will, Pastano wants the money for Loring—a bribe. Loring's in terrible trouble. He'll have to go to jail, but, oh, I don't want to give them the money for him. It's your money, Will—don't give it away—don't let them take it from us."

He caught her wrist and held it hard. "Are you out of your senses?" he asked sternly. "What do you mean—money? What money have you?"

She opened her purse and took her small savings deposit book from it. She opened the book, and put it in his hand, the total across the narrow page. His eyes were wide, incredulous. He rubbed his hand across his face.

"It's yours, Will," she said with sudden gentleness. "I have robbed you of every cent I could get from you, and I've lived as cheaply as I could, and I've banked the difference—for you."

Deep within her she heard a warning bell. She remembered that they had much to tell each other. She laid her hand upon his arm, and said in the same low tone:

"Look at me, Will." He looked at her—his brilliant black eyes fixed on her brown eyes—he looked at her deeply, with astonishment, and suddenly Ernestine was filled with a strange power and wisdom. She passed out of self-consciousness and was controlled and guided by deep instincts and ancient mother wisdom. She moved toward Will, put her face up to his and kissed his lips.

"Will," she said, smiling up at him, her lovely face alight with feeling, her tender mouth curved in a smile of sweetness. "Will, I love you. You forget it. You ignore it—you make love a burden instead of a support. I've seen it in the depths of your artist's mind—that love betrayed and entrapped you, instead of letting you free. Haven't you thought that?"

His arm trembled a little under her hand. "Only once," he said, and his face flushed, "only once—the day after I had made that picture." He motioned to the picture she still held in her free hand. "The next day, I knew that I could not go on with my dreams, I knew I would have to quit it—that day, I felt so—it seemed as though—" He paused, stumbled on, with courage. "It just seemed to me—a woman is so sweet and warm in one's arms—so generous—so lovely; and then, suddenly, there are a house, and a car, and children, and nurse maids, and cooks, and doctors—a thousand things—just suddenly. I shouldn't have felt so—I fought it—but it got

me. I'm telling you—you asked me."

Her eyes were full of tears. "I knew, Will—not just that way, but I knew—that's why I've been saving and been silent—that's why I didn't ask you any questions. But, Will, I love you. It's the biggest thing in the world to me, Will. It means to me what these pictures—what this work means to you. I'm not an artist—I'm not even artistic—but I know what your work means to you, because I love you. And when you shut me out, Will, it was for me just as it was for you when you were shut off from your work. I want you to be happy." She was solemn, young, uplifted, filled with the glory of unselfishness, her face a blurred and lovely picture seen through tears.

"Dear heart, what does the money matter? Why, Will—even more than the children—yes, though I ought not say it—more than the children, than my people, than myself. You've told me how you felt, and I'll tell you, that for a little while, for one dark time, I was jealous of your work—of your love for it. But not any more, Will."

They were both crying, his arms were around her—tight—tight. As their tears mingled and they stood together in the long embrace, the kiss that was free from passion but fraught with tenderness, the purest and holiest feeling, true married love, welled over them. It seemed to Ernestine, straining so in his arms, that for the first time she was truly wife to Will. Not only bride, bride of his body, star of his imagination, object of romantic adoration, not only the mother of his children and the keeper of his house, but wife—wife—in the deep places, the secret places of love.

"Ernestine," he whispered, after a little, and she wept afresh to hear her name so on his lips as he had whispered it when first they loved, "forgive me—that I didn't understand, that I didn't confide in you. You seemed always to have a child in your arms, a thousand needs. I felt that this other was a foe to you. I was stupid, blind. I thought you wanted the money—needed it. You were hard with me that summer before I made the cats. I didn't want to go back to that bad time again. I didn't know how wonderful you are. You're my good luck—you always were. I'll never forget it again. Oh, Ernestine, I'll do big things for you—I will."

A clock somewhere boomed two, and Ernestine started in his arms. She had remembered Loring—at last. She withdrew herself from her husband's arms and made a gesture of helplessness.

"But here's this business of Loring," she said.

"What is it about Loring?" he asked, watching her.

So with the enchantment, the throb of love still on her, she told him about Loring—about all that Pastano had said to her that morning.

"But of course," he said at once, "you must let me take the money for you—at once. Give me the slip of paper."

She gave it to him with a reluctant sigh, and he gave a whistle as he looked at it.

"How could you have refused Pastano?" he asked. "Think what it would mean to your family—to your mother. And Lillian—with Loring dragged through the mud—"

"But Will! The money's yours—it's what we've just been talking about. It's your chance."

"I don't need twenty thousand dollars," he said quickly, and then gave a laugh of pure happiness. "Why, Ernestine," he said, "if you understand—if you know what it's all about—if you can live that economically and if you're behind me, I'll take a chance on it. Give the money for Loring—we can wangle it. After all," he added more seriously, "the understanding—the way I feel now—is worth more than the money. Let Loring have the money, we're rich. When we were young and poor we did as we liked. But after we got a little money we weren't free agents any more. The big income restricted us more than the little one. Look how Loring was bound by money! Let's let it go. After all, only beggars can choose!"

"If you'll quit the paper and go ahead with this work, if you will stick to your own dreams, I'll gamble with you," she said.

"It's done," he answered. He reached for his coat and hat, and looked at his watch at the same moment.

"We'll have to go right back to the bank. Thank God, you've got the money and don't begrudge it. Nothing can stop us, now."

And before they went out into the dark and narrow hall, they kissed again, hand in hand, simply, like children pledging a secret.

Ernestine saw Ruby Pastano near the bank entrance and, though he bowed formally and did not speak, he gave her a flashing, radiant glance, like the flash of a mirror held in the sun. She knew that he understood, from the happy countenance and from Will at her side, that they were looking after Loring.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Demand for Dwarfs Met by Inhuman Exploiters

Dwarfs were the lapdogs of medieval times. And so popular were they that many merchants specialized in selling them to the nobility.

"Marc Antony owned a dwarf," writes M. R. Werner in Liberty, whom he called, ironically, Sisypus. In Rome there were dwarf merchants who, when they could not obtain natural specimens for the emperors and nobles, manufactured dwarfs by undernourishing normal babies, or by binding their limbs to prevent full development.

"Tiberius, Domitian and Hellogabulus paid high prices to their dwarf merchants, who experimented constantly to supply the demand. Cath-

erine de Medicis, in order to secure a regular supply of dwarfs for her court and as presents for her friends, caused all the dwarfs of her establishment to be married in a large scale effort to produce a race of midgets. The marriages, however, were uniformly barren, and her majesty was sadly disappointed."

Get What's Coming to Them
A youthful actress has written a tragedy in which all the characters are strangled. This will be a nice change from the too-familiar type of play in which all the characters ought to be.—Passing Show, London.

Community Building

Up-to-Date Community Looks to the Future

The planning of cities and towns is a growing civic activity. It was only a few years ago that the first real city plan was worked out. Now two-thirds of American cities and towns of more than 25,000 population have plan commissions working for the orderly development of these communities. There are 208 in all, according to a report issued by the Department of Commerce. But what is even more interesting, because it has in it an element of surprise, is that of towns of less than 25,000 population, ranging down to as low as 500, there are 483 that have either plan commissions or individual commissioners planning for the growth, the facilities and the attractiveness of their respective places.

While the great possibilities of courageous city planning will be realized in the large centers, some of the most interesting achievements doubtless will be in smaller places, where relatively more can be done with comparatively small outlay. There is increasing incentive for town improvement of towns, large and small. There are the merits of the improvements themselves, the aspiration and satisfaction of better standards of living. But there also is the element of competition, in business and in enterprise.—Kansas City Times.

Home's Value Added To by Proper Landscaping

When conditions make it possible for the family to buy or build a larger and better home, the probable resale value of the property is an important consideration either in obtaining financing for the new structure or in disposing of the old one, and the landscaping of the surrounding plot will in turn considerably affect the value of the property.

Trees, shrubbery and plantings in general give to the house background of traditional hominess that is difficult to obtain in any other way and have a never-ending influence upon those who live within the house as well as those who pass by.

Beauty in the development of the garden is a matter of starting right and then going on in the same direction. Beautiful gardens do not just happen. The placement of the background plantings plays an important part. Informed opinion from your florist and study of garden schemes in standard publications are easily accessible guides against mistakes.

Contractors' Responsibility

As a decisive move in a program launched to safeguard the public from the acts of irresponsible contractors the bureau of contract information has been incorporated under the laws of Delaware.

Data on the manner in which each general contractor in the United States has fulfilled past contract obligations is to be gathered and utilized in an effort to eliminate conditions that have made for irresponsibility in the construction industry. This was announced by the Associated General Contractors of America and comes as the culmination of several years of debate about practices involved in the writing of surety bonds.

The undertaking is a venture in co-operation between surety companies and organized contractors, although it is independently organized as a fact-gathering and investigating agency.

Shingles Grow in Favor

The picturesqueness of wood shingles for walls and roofs appeals strongly to home builders who prefer the quaintness of the simpler colonial homes. Shingled roofs may be developed in soft colors that mellow with time. A pleasing effect may be had with a blend of two or more colors.

The roof is seen before any other part of the house; therefore, be sure you have chosen the most pleasing color scheme for it. This is next in importance to the kind and quality of roofing selected.

Highways and Cities

Trunk highways around cities, rather than through them, are seen as a solution of traffic congestion. More distributing routes, instead of excessive widening of existing roads, are prescribed by D. R. Lamson, engineer of the American Road Builders' association, after a national survey of traffic conditions. "Population centers are the nuclei of congestion. Traffic in large cities is making transportation by horse-driven trucks cheaper than by motor vehicles."

Trees Aid Brick Designs

Wooded settings are always desirable with the brick house. There is something especially attractive about the play of light and shadow on a brick facade, particularly when the sunlight comes stealing through the foliage, glinting here and there upon an unusually colorful brick.

Co-Operation and Business

The right kind of co-operation among business men of a community can be an asset to both business and the community.—Lorain Journal.

Zoning Laws in 856 Cities

Early this year zoning ordinances were in effect in 856 cities and towns in the United States.

Adrift With Humor

A DIPLOMAT

That a certain young man is wise beyond his years was proved when he paused before answering a widow who had asked him to guess her age. "You must have some idea," she said.

REDUCED HER WAIST

"I have several ideas," said the young man, with a smile. "The only trouble is that I hesitate whether to make you ten years younger on account of your looks or ten years older on account of your intelligence."

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YOUR pipe is in right with friend wife the moment she gets that new and milder fragrance of Sir Walter's favorite mixture. A welcome blend of choice, mild tobaccos, kept fresh in a heavy gold foil wrap. Be fair to yourselves, men, and fair to the fair sex. Let Sir Walter make your pipe a pipe of peace.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

It's rye and It's milder

Woman's Photograph Fatal
That Phillis Dickinson, twenty-nine, of Leeds, England, died from antemortem, contracted while she was having her photograph taken in a cornfield during a holiday two years ago, was the theory advanced at the inquest recently. A doctor said the disease came from growing grain and was rare in human beings, but often found in cattle.

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Diamond Dyes

Highest Quality for 50 Years

Time to Retire
"I don't see why you suddenly refuse to marry me just because I asked you for one little kiss."
"Because," replied the girl, "any modern fellow who would ask for a kiss isn't aggressive enough to make a good living."—Montreal Star.

tired every morning?

Get poisons out of the system with Feen-a-mint, the Chewing Gum Laxative. Smaller doses effective when taken in this form. A modern, scientific, family laxative. Safe and mild.

