

Beggar Woman

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Beggar Woman

Margaret looked at the scene in front of her with disdain. *That bag lady is back, sitting in front of Firenzo's again. It's a disgrace. Why does she have to sit there right in the middle of the shopfront, polluting the upmarket ambiance of the street? Why do people allow it?*

The bag lady noticed her staring and looked up with a pitiful face, with bags under her eyes from lack of sleep and dirt and sweat adhering to it. She saw the disgust on Margaret's face and quickly looked away again, pretending to tidy the begging mat in front of her as she wiped some smudge from her cheek.

And you should feel embarrassed about sitting there. Margaret pointed her nose up at the tramp and deliberately avoided the woman as she proceeded to the store's entrance. *It's just not right. How are people meant to look at the current promotions in the display windows with any sort of critical appraisal with her there?*

The concierge attending the entrance to the shop opened the door at Margaret's approach, nodding his welcome in his usual practiced style. She haughtily nodded her required appreciation as she passed the threshold of the premises.

Margaret walked through the store with practiced poise, looking at the displayed items as she passed down the various aisles. She was desperate to see the newly arrived stock of summer frocks, eager to be the first in town to sport one of the new collections. Arriving at Ladies-Wear, she spied Janice also browsing through the collection. This was going to be awkward. She would have to greet Janice with pretentious charm.

Janice quickly glanced at her and immediately looked away. She slowly created a growing distance between them. *That is just typical.* Margaret looked away and pretended not to notice. She looked at the frocks on the racks but couldn't really concentrate for a time. She did notice that the upcoming summer fashion had the floral pastel design that she always liked and in the most sophisticated labels as well. She just had to buy some of them to model to her friends, especially for the afternoon tea on Thursday that she had invited all her friends to.

She browsed through the racks and picked a couple her size to try on. She paraded with them to the fitting rooms, hoping that Janice noticed her fashionable choices. The door of the room swung shut behind her after she walked in and she tried the dresses on. They were a perfect fit for her body. She was very careful to maintain a model's figure. *They will be perfect for Thursday and the other afternoon teas I have planned as well.* She bought them on the spot, making sure that all involved in the transaction saw that she didn't really care about the financial expense of the purchase, although a tinge of guilt coloured her disposition when she saw the final bill of sale. She realised there may be some explaining to do later, but that was for later and he would understand. She collected the bag that her purchases had been packed into from the assistant serving her and nodded appreciation for the excellent service provided.

Margaret was about to leave the area when she saw Christine browsing through the section where the standard line of dresses was displayed. Margaret decided to go and say hello to her. Christine had her back to Margaret at the time. She approached. "Well hello Christine. I wasn't expecting to see you here."

Christine cringed at the voice before she turned. She put on a smile, "I am just looking to find a new dress for our wedding anniversary. It's coming up soon and I wanted to surprise Fred."

"Yes well, it certainly will be a surprise. I hope that you can find a matching colour coordination this time. There is only a limited selection in this area."

Christine reddened slightly with embarrassment and resentment. "We all have to watch our pennies these days."

"I suppose we can't all have husbands high up in the business world. Not to worry. I must invite you over for afternoon tea sometime. Well, have to go now. Ciao."

"Yes Ok. See you too."

Margaret turned and walked down the aisle to the store exit, pleased with how the conversation had turned out. At least someone wanted to talk to her, although Christine would come over to her house over her dead body. She wasn't going to lower her standards. She left the store and noted that the bag lady was still in the same position.

It took Margaret forty minutes to drive to her place of residence and unpack the car. She noticed that there were several messages on the message machine and decided to listen to them once she poured herself a drink. She got a glass and poured a wine from the half empty bottle of Pinot Gris chilling in the refrigerator, gulped it down, poured another glass and went to the answering machine. She pressed the button to replay the messages.

"...Hello Margaret...Just a quick hello to let you know I won't be able to come to your afternoon tea on Thursday. Hope all goes well...Rachel," the first message sounded.

Margaret played the rest of the messages. They were from her other friends, all declining her invitation. She sipped her wine after each rejection and gulped the rest down after the last message, shaking with outrage by the obvious snub of her offered hospitality. *They can't all be busy.* Her shoulders slumped and she went back to the refrigerator for another refill. The bottle was empty once she poured the rest of the contents with the glass only half full. She threw the empty bottle in the sink for her to take to the bin later on. The glass was empty again before Margaret realised she had drunk anything from it. She staggered down the passage to get another bottle but stopped walking when she started to pass the hallway mirror. Margaret looked into it. The person looking back at her looked very lonely, desperate and begging for attention, a forlorn helplessness radiating from her eyes as Margaret looked at her with tears and mascara streaking down her cheeks. She wiped the mascara from one of the cheeks as she looked pitifully at herself.

About the Author

John Wegener grew up in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia. He has decided to express his imaginative dreams and start engaging in writing after a 34-year career as a Chemical Engineer in the steel industry, which has taken him to many countries and allowed him to experience many cultures. John currently lives in Wollongong, Australia with his wife and children.

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