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# TRAMP

By Jack McGarr

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It was a brisk, bright day in the little town of Ardmore, Kansas. It was a day that made everyone glad to be alive.

In the yard of a neat white cottage along the shaded street was Johnnie Martin. He was pondering over what his mother had just told him. She had told him to always stay away from all tramps and shabby looking men because they didn't like little boys and might harm him. This was quite a problem for a boy of 5 years to figure out but having a small boy's confidence in his mother, he decided that he would run to her when he saw a tramp. That settled it and it was soon out of his mind as he went about his busy playing.

However, one person in this small town wasn't happy. Instead of making him feel good, this beautiful day brought unpleasant memories of the home that he used to have to surge through his mind. He was dressed in shabby clothes. His pants were tattered and torn and his shirt looked as if it would fall apart at the slightest provocation. He had an old slouch hat pulled far down over his face as if to cover it up.

His appearance along the street set up a shrill barking of all the dogs along the street but he was used to this and paid no attention to it. However, in spite of his experienced way and nonchalant manner, he didn't look to be any more than around twenty-eight years old.

As he came up to the neat little cottage he thought, This looks like a likely place to get a "hand out" and he decided to try it. As he opened the back gate, Johnnie immediately saw him and ran into the house shrieking something about a tramp to his mother. By this time the tramp had reached the back door and had knocked.

Mrs. Martin, a young woman of perhaps twenty-six years of age, opened the door immediately and demanded in a rather cross voice what he wanted.

"Lady," he said, "could you spare me a bite to eat?"

"If all of you tramps would work more and beg less, the whole world would be a lot better off. Tell me," she said, "why did you ever start bumming around the country. Because of mere laziness?"

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"I have never before told anyone about myself but since you put it so harshly, I will tell you."

"Well come in and get something to eat first," she said. As he was just finishing his meal with a cup of coffee, he started by saying:

"I was raised on a farm and had the best mother and father that a boy ever had, but I never realized it until it was too late. I went along like the average boy does until I had finished high school. My father decided the best thing for me to do would be to go to college, so in September after graduation I did. I shall never forget that feeling of loneliness and depression that assailed me after I had been on the train about an hour. However, in due time I reached college and for the first few weeks I hardly knew what was going on. I was as bewildered as the average fish I suppose and I often look back on those days and laugh as I think of all the crazy things that I did.

"I lived the life of an ordinary fish, which is none too easy, and I nearly flunked out at midterm. I was the kind who took my college education as a matter of fact, since I didn't have to work for it and never knew what it was to really have to get down and earn something. I never looked on my education as a preparation for my life's work and as a result I didn't get much out of it. However, after nearly flunking out, I decided to settle down to some real work and make some good grades because I had gotten a terrible letter from my dad for making such a poor showing.

"Everything then went well through my sophomore year and the following summer I became engaged to the most wonderful girl in the world or so I thought at that time. But I was soon to change my mind for when St. Valentine's day came around in my Junior year, I hadn't any more than mailed a box of candy to the girl than I received a letter informing me that she was married. At first I was sort of stunned and hurt but later I changed my attitude and said 'to hell' with all women.

"The next summer I sustained another blow when both my parents were killed in an auto accident. However, they left me a tidy sum of money and my father's last words were for me to finish my college education. But thinking that I ought to stay at home and watch after things, I made the biggest mistake in my life in not finishing my education. Never having known the value of money, I had soon squandered all the money my parents left me. Then was when I started bumming around and, not knowing how to do anything, as I had had it so easy all my life, I have just been drifting around ever since.

"Well," he said, "I thank you for the kindness you have shown me and I guess I had better be moving along to new pastures."

That night as James Martin came home he said, "Bess, you seem to have something on your mind. Is there anything the matter or has anything happened today?"

"No," she evaded him by saying, "I have had a headache all day and I'm not feeling so well."

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by Johnnie's asking, "Mother, are all tramps mean men?"

"No, Johnnie," she said, "not all of them."