



A story is told about an incident that happened during the thirties in New York, on one of the coldest days of the year, the world was in the grip of the Great Depression, and all over the city, the poor were close to starvation.

It happened that the judge was sitting on the bench that day, hearing a complaint against a woman who was charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She pleaded that her daughter was sick, and her grandchildren were starving, because their father had abandoned the family. But the shopkeeper, whose loaf had been stolen, refused to drop the charge. He insisted that an example be made of the poor old woman, as a deterrent to others.

The judge sighed. He was most reluctant to pass judgment on the woman, yet he had no alternative. 'I'm sorry,' he turned to her, 'But I can't make any exceptions. The law is the law. I sentence you to a fine of ten dollars, and if you can't pay I must send you to jail for ten days.'

The woman was heartbroken, but even as he was passing sentence, the judge was reaching into his pocket for the money to pay off the ten-dollar fine. He took off his hat, tossed the ten dollars bill into it, and then addressed the crowd:

'I am also going to impose a fine of fifty cents on every person here present in this courtroom, for living in a town where a person has to steal bread to save her grandchildren from starvation. Please collect the fine, Mr. Bailiff, in this hat, and pass them across to the defendant.'

And so the accused went home that day from the courtroom with forty-seven dollars and fifty cents — fifty cents of which had been paid by the shame-faced grocery store keeper who had brought the charge against her. And as she left the courtroom, the gathering of petty criminals and New York policemen gave the judge a standing ovation.



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