

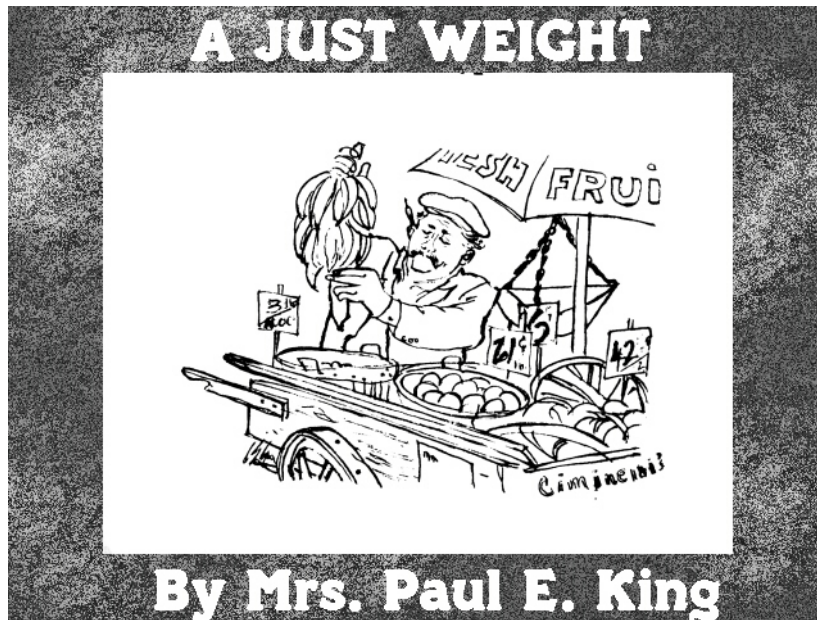
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A JUST WEIGHT
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I looked up from my work in time to see my employer watching me and the old, nervous, queasy and uneasy feeling popped up inside my being, like it had been doing lately. I had worked for Mr. Ciminelli exactly two months and fifteen days and I loved every single minute of it until he issued his ultimatum fourteen days ago.

"Martin," he said that day as he addressed me in little more than a whispered tone of voice, "you must learn to push down a bit on the scale when weighing out fruits and vegetables."

I dropped the head of cabbage I had been ready to weigh and looked at him in shock. Then I gasped as the significance of his words settled in upon me and exploded like a bright light inside my brain. I couldn't believe my ears. Still, I knew I had never had so much as even the slightest hint of a hearing problem, so I knew my employer had said what I could scarcely believe I had heard him say.

I looked at him and, with tears in my eyes, I said, "Oh, I could never do that, Mr. Ciminelli. Never! That would be dishonest. It would be cheating."

He had waited until a nearby customer was no longer nearby and was out of hearing, then he edged himself up sideways to me and with a face livid with anger, he said, "You are working for me! Do you hear, Martin? I am your employer. You will do as I say or. . . ."

There was a rush of business then and he didn't finish his sentence. Pushing me out of the way, he said, "I'll take over here. You get busy sorting and arranging the fruits and produce on the display counters."

And that is where I worked from that day to the present hour. Not that I minded; I didn't. Not in the least. In fact, it was a relief, since I did none of the weighing anymore.

Like I stated previously, I enjoyed every minute of my working schedule. It was exactly what I had wanted for the summer and for after-school hours. I felt the job was an answer to prayer, which, indeed, it was.

To the customers, Mr. Ciminelli was a jolly man. He laughed a lot. His laughter exploded with a boom, loud and hard. I attributed much of the success of his business to his likableness and his air of jollity and gaiety. He was easy to work for and with and a joy to be around. Until his sudden and totally unexpected issuance of the ultimatum, that is.

I worked away, doing everything I could to keep the market as picture-perfect as possible. His was a quaintly-attractive market and I loved the extra things he did to make it that way. It was an outside market; an open-air

market with tables, stands and bins galore. To one side was a new shed-like building of moderate size, in which was a cooler and storage space for storing the unsold fruits and vegetables at the end of his long days. His cart went in there too.

The old time vendor's cart, which Mr. Ciminelli had used in an earlier, younger time in his life on the busy streets in the downtown areas of the big cities, now stood like a portly old man, tired and much worn but still of good use, in a prominent place of the outdoor market. The cart, with its bearing of another, long-ago era and time, drew passersby to it (and its contents) in a remarkable way. Mr. Ciminelli knew this and he saw to it that the cart had only the biggest, the best, and the choicest fruits in it at all times. He had regular customers who bought only from the cart. That old cart had charm. My employer was proud of it. I liked it too: It took me back to stories my grandfather told of the vendors in his day and of the wares they sold.

I looked up again and saw Mr. Ciminelli busy with customers around the vendor's cart. Mainly, they were people along in years. I wondered if they, like my employer, didn't feel that, for a brief time at least, they were back in another era: back in their day; that long-ago period and time of caring and sharing, when neighbors were neighborly and a man's word was his bond.

I felt a surge of sudden pity wash over me for the man weighing the produce and fruits. I was troubled over his soul. I had talked to him about this more than once and, always, he had made a joke out of it, stating that I should continue believing as I cared to but that I should grant him the privilege of believing as he wanted to believe.

I guess, for one who has lived all his life in a home with sound Biblical teachings and principles and gone to a church of the same caliber and with the same doctrine and principles, it's hard to believe, and realize, that not all men will be, or are, open to the teachings of God's Holy Word, the Bible. I wondered numerous times if my employer had ever gone to Sunday school and church as a boy, or, even, if he had ever gone in all of his life. It was hard for me to imagine a man of his age not having ever gone. But, still, I knew there were people who hadn't and who didn't. I learned this when I went out calling and canvassing our neighborhood with my Sunday school teacher. It shocked me and gave me a heavy burden which drove me to my knees in earnest and fervent prayer. Repeated trips back to the unchurched homes eventually paid off in five different families starting to church and making their

peace with God. But for the most part, the others continued on with their no church attitude and mind-set, a thing that kept me much in prayer lest they lose their soul by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ and spend eternity in the lake of fire.

My thoughts were interrupted by a lady who came to where I was working and said, "Please, young man, weigh these things up for me. I'm in a hurry; I can't wait in line a single minute longer. And why should I, when there's a scale over here too?"

I took the basket which she gave me and hurried over to the scale hanging above some oranges and lemons and soon had everything weighed up. She thanked me profusely before hurrying over to the cash register where Cindy Hargrove checked her out.

Customer after customer came over to me for weighing up their vegetables and fruits. I was frustrated. I hadn't been told to weigh up anything since Mr. Ciminelli's ultimatum. But I knew, too, that with the rush hour something had to be done or customers would lay down their produce and walk away in disgust and anger. The line was getting longer to my employer's scale at the old vendor's cart. Already, I had heard undertones of unrest and impatience. But with each of us busy at the scales now, the lines kept moving smoothly and Cindy's cash register seemed to run non-stop.

Always, the after-work crowd who stopped regularly at the stand was in a hurry to get home. A big hurry. And Mr. Ciminelli always did his best to accommodate them. I was praying silently that he'd take this into consideration now as I weighed. I was thankful that I had had an abundance of fresh vegetables and fruits ready on the counters and in the bins and that I could keep the customers in my line moving quickly and smoothly.

We worked later than usual and when we closed up for the night, Mr. Ciminelli said, "I want to see you, Martin."

"I'm here, Sir," I said, thankful that Cindy had gone fifteen minutes before. She had thought Mr. Ciminelli was unfair with me, making me do all "the dirty work" and "the heavy work," as she termed it. I told her I loved doing what I was doing and that it was neither dirty nor extremely heavy work. I didn't tell her -- not a single word of it -- about our employer's ultimatum to me nor of his dishonesty. Cindy didn't know how to hold her

tongue, for one thing and, too, I was talking to the only One who could change the dear man's heart. I didn't need to tell anyone else.

I noticed tired lines around Mr. Ciminelli's blue-gray eyes and a well of intense pity washed over me for him. I felt tears sting my eyes. "You're tired," I said kindly. "You worked too hard this evening. Will you allow me to run over to the drive-in and get you a steak sandwich, please?"

Mr. Ciminelli stood leaning against a counter, looking at me. "Thanks, but no," he said.

I pulled an apple crate out from beneath a counter and sat on it, offering a second crate to my boss.

"Thanks, I believe I will," he said, dropping down on the wooden crate with a heavy sigh.

"Now Martin," he said, as he wiped perspiration from his face, "I appreciate the help you gave me on the scale this evening; but you know what I ordered you to do. Did you follow my orders?"

"No Sir, I didn't. I told you I wouldn't, Sir. And if you want to fire me and let me go, I'll go right now. I am a Christian, as I told you before. I obey and do the things my Lord tells me in His Word to do or not to do. I cannot cheat, Mr. Ciminelli. I will not cheat. Cheating is a sin, and there will be no sin -- or sinner -- in Heaven.

"God commanded Moses, in Deuteronomy 25:13, 15 and 16, to tell the Israelites, and for all peoples, 'Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights. . . .'

"'But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

"'For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.'

"No, my dear Sir, I won't cheat. And if this is to be my last and final day of work here, I want to thank you for hiring me and keeping me on this long. I

have enjoyed my work. And it's been a pleasure knowing you and working for you. Until you disclosed your 'method' of acquiring and making a few more dollars, that is."

"What I do is my business, Martin."

The man's voice quivered and shook, like he was near tears.

"Please don't think me bold, dear friend, but what you do is also God's business," I said tenderly and kindly, feeling intense pity and compassion surge over me for the man who had hired me on to work for him. On impulse, I asked tearfully, "May I pray for you, Mr. Ciminelli? Right now? Please? I love you. . . ."

Getting to his feet, he dismissed me, saying, 'You take care of Martin; I'll take care of Lou Ciminelli. Goodnight. And, oh, by the way, be back at your usual time in the morning.'

"You . . . you . . . you really mean it?" I asked jubilantly but incredulously. "I . . . well, I won't cheat, Mr. Ciminelli. I'll work only under this condition."

"I know. I know, Martin. Now go home and get some rest. Today was a hard day. But a good day, too. Yes, a very good day. And I don't mean merely moneywise either. Today Lou Ciminelli learned a lesson; a much-needed lesson. I'm proud of you, Martin. Yes, I meant it -- proud of you. You have what my grandfather had. Hang on to it. It's bigger and more powerful than all my threats and my attempts at intimidating you. I like this. Maybe, after all these years, my grandfather's prayers will be answered for his money-hungry grandson. Goodnight, Martin."

"Goodnight, Mr. Ciminelli, and thanks. Oh yes, before you leave, what I have is not an it; it is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten, beloved Son. He lives within me; in my heart."

Mr. Ciminelli turned and smiled. "I know, Martin. I know," he said, as we left the shed and he locked up for the night.

Tired? I was too happy to notice. All the way home I seemed to be floating on a cloud. My employer was mellowing and my soul was in orbit as it laid claim to Hebrews 11:1.