

Special Unit 1

A Dollar on the Conscience

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The customer asked, "Is it fifty-five cents a yard?" while getting her handbag ready. In their town, Mr. Levering was known as an honest and principled merchant. He was proud of this reputation and believed he deserved it. The actual price was fifty cents a yard, as Mr. Levering had told her earlier, but she misunderstood him. When the lady assumed that it was fifty-five cents per yard, he immediately said, "Yes, it is." The love of gain was strong in his mind, but when the words were uttered, a disturbing perception of something restrained him.

"I need twenty yards," the customer replied, still believing it was fifty-five cents per yard. Mr. Levering stayed silent and began measuring the fabric.

"It's a real bargain at that price," the lady commented. "You could say that," said Mr. Levering. "But I obtained this fabric at a low price, too."

"Twenty yards at fifty-five cents is just eleven dollars," said the customer. She counted the money and gave it to Mr. Levering, who put it in the cash register immediately.

"Send the bundle to 300 Argyle Street, please," the lady said, smiling, as she turned away.

"Wait, there's been a slight mistake!" Mr. Levering wanted to say, but he couldn't bring himself to. He had just taken an extra dollar from her, and that was that. Gaining money at the cost of his self-respect weighed heavily on him. The burden of that dollar felt like a heavy stone dragging him down. He tried to rationalize it, but the guilt stuck with him. It affected his mood at home with his wife and kids, even though they usually brought him joy.

"What's wrong, dear? Does your head ache?" his wife inquired, concerned about his unusually silent night.

"I'm fine," he said, forcing a smile.

"Pa," his son excitedly said, "Eddy Jones stole a dollar at school today."

"Stole a dollar?" Mr. Levering was shocked, feeling a cold shiver.

"Emma Wilson saw it all, and they found the dollar in his pocket," his son explained. "He looked so pale, and he was crying so much. I felt bad for him. They sent for his mother, and she took him home."

"It must have been hard for his mother," Mr. Levering said.

"But even worse for such a small child," his wife added. "He'll always remember his crime and disgrace."

These words hit Mr. Levering hard. They made him uneasy and unable to enjoy his family's company. He had to take a long walk to calm himself down before retiring to bed.

The next day, the customer from the day before entered his store. His heart raced, thinking she realized he had overcharged her and had come to condemn him. However, she didn't suspect anything. She actually bought more things. Giving her change back, Mr. Levering thought, "That weight shall be off my conscience," and gave her an extra dollar. He was hoping that doing that would relieve his guilt. Unfortunately for him, she noticed the "error," and he reluctantly took the dollar back.

The dollar on his conscience was like a stain that couldn't be washed off. Mr. Levering couldn't shake off the guilt of his actions, even after trying to return the money. He thought of throwing it into the street, or giving it away to a homeless person, but his conscience whispered in his ear that the dollar wasn't his to give away.

That Sunday, he went to church with his family, but the only words he heard of the sermon were "dishonest dealings," making him feel even worse. He thought of putting the dollar in the church's donation box to ease his mind. However, he knew it wouldn't provide lasting relief. The guilt would remain.

He thought that confessing to the customer and returning her money in person would ease his mind. But doing that would be humiliating. He finally decided to send the lady an anonymous letter with the dollar enclosed and a short, vague explanation about the money. It was a bitter experience for him to have to go to such lengths to lift the burden of the dollar from his conscience. Although his debt was cleared, his actions could not be reversed, and because of that, he still gets reminded of what he did from time to time.