

Loud Talk on a Cell Phone

Once, a man who had experienced a very long day made his way to the train. Along the way, he dropped his briefcase, stepped in chewing gum, and had to wait in a long line just to get through the turnstile. When he got on the train, it was crowded and hot because the air conditioning system was not working.

At the first stop the train made, a young woman who was talking very loudly on her cell phone boarded. People speaking loudly on cell phones happened to be one of the man's pet peeves; and considering that he'd already had a rough day, the blaring voice was really bothering him.

He thought back to how the day had started. His boss had questioned his competence, and it had all been downhill from there. He began to fantasize about what it might be like to work for a manager who appreciated him. But his thoughts were interrupted when the young woman screamed into her phone: "I need to know. I need to know right now!"

"What could be so important?" The man asked himself that question, then closed his eyes and took refuge in dreaming about the day he would turn in his resignation – and the shock and regret with which it would be met.

But once again, the man was jolted from his reverie by the woman shouting: "I need to know. I need to know right now!"

The man was ready to explode now. He was going to tell this silly woman to keep it down. Who did she think she was anyway, acting so ignorant on the train? Who didn't know how rude it was to talk loudly on cell phones these days? Even the Transportation Authority had launched a campaign of clever signs reminding people how annoying this could be. Yes, he would say something. She deserved it for trampling all over his fantasy of his boss begging him not to leave. She deserved it for being loud and obnoxious. He was going to let her have it. It was going to be great.

Just then, the train pulled into a stop and a young man boarded and saw the woman. He threw his arms around her, and with tears streaming down his cheeks, he buried his face in her shoulder.

"The hospital just called," he said. "She's stable."

We are all prone to make quick judgments about people and the circumstances we see before us. But we can never really know what issues they may be facing, what kind of mountains – and we all have them – they may be trying to climb.

Perception, you see, is everything.

– Beecher Hunter