

## Chain

When Carly found out about her husband's mistress, she didn't stop to think about the issue, or try to put things into perspective. When Michael arrived home from work, she began talking, even before he had taken off his shoes. She allowed her speech to go unchecked, and finally ordered him out of the house, unquestionably ending the marriage.

At first, as Michael walked along the street, he felt almost glad that he was through with Carly, but as the distance increased, his anger built. He had put a great deal of effort into their relationship, and though he had been cheating on her, he realized that Carly had been his first priority. Now that was over, and all he had left was Sarah, who, he had to admit, he didn't truly care about. Half an hour later he found himself at her doorstep, hoping for a place to crash for the night. He opened the door without knocking, and found Sarah in bed with a man that Michael did not recognize. Seeing the scene as if from a great distance, Michael lunged forward, grabbed the man by the neck and began beating his fists into his face. Several moments passed and the man slumped into a bloody heap on the floor. Michael looked up and saw that Sarah had bolted out the door.

Instead of going to the police to report the violence, Sarah found her way to her sister's house, which was the only safe haven she knew. Melissa took her in and gave her a cup of coffee, and they sat down to talk. Sarah explained to her sister what had happened, and finally ended with, "I can't believe I ever got involved with that fucking bastard. I didn't know he was so Goddamn violent."

Hearing her own sister use such language felt like a dagger in Melissa's chest. "You know my rules, Sarah," she said. "Under no circumstances are you to offend me with vulgarity. If you cannot control yourself I'm going to have to ask you to leave." She pointed at the door. Sarah attempted to defend herself, but Melissa wanted an apology and nothing more, so Sarah was ordered out. Melissa didn't like to do it, but she had always believed that if a person couldn't speak without swearing, they do not deserve to be heard. She thought about this for a long while, trying to calm herself after the shock of hearing the "cuss words." Eventually she walked outside and because she was still distracted, she didn't notice herself wandering into the middle of the street.

Kevin, the young man who ran her over, knew logically that it wasn't his fault. The woman had just suddenly walked out in front of his car. But the feeling of guilt overran his judgments, and he drove on. He drove for nearly three hours until he started running low on gas and had to stop to refill. As he stood and pumped the gasoline into the tank, Kevin thought about the fact that if he had just stopped, there would have been no crime. The only crime he'd committed was leaving the scene of an accident. He continued thinking about this as he walked into the building to pay, and on his way, bumped into a man carrying an oversized soda.

"Hey, watch it ass-hole," Anthony shouted at the kid. When the boy did not respond, he called, "You know it's idiots like you who make this world such a shitty place to live." He considered going after the kid and saying more, but he had to be on his way. He was already late for the rock concert he was assigned to review. When he finally arrived, the opening band had already begun. They sounded unimpressive to say the least, and in his article on the subject the next day he stated that "they lacked rhythm, and seemed like they kept playing the same song

over and over again. The words could not be understood and all they did was beat their fists against the instruments."

Upon reading the review of his performance, Mark, the leader of the band, tossed his guitar out a third story window and stormed out of the loft where they practiced, ending his music career forever. He walked home, randomly pounding his fists into walls. When he arrived, he gave his girlfriend a quick kiss and sat down at his computer and wrote the critic an e-mail, outlining what a horrible person he was. After he'd finished he watched some television. On the news, some overweight woman angrily listed a few dozen books that she felt were offensive and needed to be banned from schools. Mark's girlfriend was talking on the phone to someone named Cathy in the background as Mark began grumbling to himself, enraged that someone would consider limiting literature. "I hate fat people," was the only thing Mark could come up with to express how he felt about the woman. "I really hate fat people."

Cathy, who had recently realized that she had gained a few pounds and was now nearly ten pounds overweight, barely made out what Mark said in the background. "He doesn't like fat people, huh?" she said into the phone. "You should tell your boyfriend that he needs to watch what he says. It is very difficult to maintain a perfect figure." And she slammed the receiver down. Standing up she went to the closet and put on her jogging clothes. He might have been a jerk about it, but maybe the guy was right. On her way out of the building, a homeless man crossed her path, asking for money. "I have nothing," she said. "Get out of my way."

Mitch shrugged. Only one in every twenty people actually gave money. The woman's refusal simply meant he was one closer to someone who would. He walked on. Eventually he found himself in the park where he spent many of his lonely nights. Another woman sat on a bench nearby and he went to her. After he'd given the standard line, she replied with, "Why don't you spend your efforts trying to get a job, rather than panhandling people? Those of us who work for a living shouldn't have to deal with this." Mitch stared at her, and after several long moments, he spoke.

The bum nodded. "I understand how you feel," he said. "I didn't mean to bother you. It's hard for me to make ends meet sometimes. I realize I need a job, but who's going to hire a guy like me? I won't bother you further." Carly watched as the man turned and walked away. It stunned her a little to know that she was so harsh with someone who only asked for a little change; but it stunned her more to see how he reacted. The incident brought her attention away from the thought of her husband. She tried to picture the world through the eyes of the homeless man. She imagined living on the street, never having a change of clothes, begging for money every day to survive.

"Hey!" she called, and when the man stopped and turned around she motioned him to come back. Slowly, he walked toward her, his chin lowered.

Carly pulled out a five dollar bill and handed it to him. He took it and grinned at her. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you so much. I am not going to forget this." He began to walk off, but turned around and called out, "I promise you, I will not forget this."

Several minutes later, after the bum was out of sight, Carly sat back down on the bench, and her thoughts eventually returned to the betrayal she felt because of her husband. She decided to try to see the whole incident through his eyes.

The marriage wasn't perfect. She'd been able to tell that much, and she could see now how her husband had felt, and why he'd found that other woman. Carly didn't agree with what

he'd done, and she knew that she'd never do the same, but she saw how he could have made the mistake. Everyone has reasons for doing what they do; and everyone makes mistakes.

Carly realized that she hadn't been perfect either.

She no longer saw society as dominoes, or cause and effect. A person has control over how they feel; it's only a matter of exerting that control. She smiled as she realized she had broken free of the chains of her own emotions.