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The Cessation of Nick Fitzgerald.

Nicholas Fitzgerald sat at his mahogany desk staring into a pack of cigarettes. It was his last pack. Inside it was his last cigarette. He'd committed himself to quit smoking. Nick drew the last cigarette from the pack with finality. He lit it and inhaled deeply. Upon finishing the cigarette he tamped it out, stood up, and walked out of his office to buy another pack.

Nick's mind was fragmented as he walked to the store. One part of his mind begged him to quit smoking, another part begged this part of his mind to quit being such a nag. Nick proceeded until he had a fresh pack of Camel Lights in his hand, then he sat down on a public bench.

Alone with his score, Nick unwrapped the pack and absently pulled a cigarette out. Before he was able to light it, his eyes began to sting with the infiltration of heavy tobacco smoke. Nick looked around and saw no one else smoking. Then he noted casually that a fat little man sporting a gown, wings, and a halo was perched on his right shoulder, smoking an impressively large cigar.

"Quit smoking those damn things," the overgrown cherub said through a blanket of smoke.

Nick stared down at his unlit cigarette as if he had said this to himself, which he assumed he had since that was more likely than the alternative.

"Look at me. Hey, you hear me boy?"

Nick heard him but responded by looking over the opposite shoulder to ignore the possibility that he really had heard him.

“Don’t look at me. For once I agree with him,” said a thin, horned man in a sophisticated business suit standing on Nick’s left shoulder. He spat a repellent mixture of saliva and tobacco. A tiny bead of brown spittle landed on Nick’s unlit cigarette and he dropped it as if it had become white hot.

“That’s a good start,” said the devil.

“Now step on it, and throw that pack away.” Nick did exactly as the cherub instructed. As he crushed the pack and dropped it in a public trash bin, Nick believed the little imaginary men would disappear. Being distinctly not imaginary, the little men did not abide.

Nick walked back towards his office, doing his utmost to ignore the fact that he bore two tiny men on his shoulders. The men were carrying on a discussion that made Nick question the idea that his imagination had anything to do with them.

“So when did you start chewing tobacco?” asked the cherub of the devil.

“PR came up with that one, said if we used tobacco it had to be smokeless. Trying to clean up our image a little. Besides, the horns get the point across.” He chuckled at his unintended word play.

“Yeah, they tried to get us on the patch but our image is pretty solid, got the wings and the halo and whatnot.”

Nick suddenly felt rude for eavesdropping on the private conversation. He cleared his throat loudly. The sudden movement of his chest and shoulders threw the little men off balance.

“Hey, what are you trying to do here?” grumbled the cherub as he clung to an earlobe.

“Excuse me, I just - I’m not sure what you two are talking about,” Nick offered politely.

“None of your business, head,” the devil chided.

There was a long silence before Nick finally snapped. He became enraged and slapped violently at the little men, who simply vanished and reappeared as his hand passed over the space they occupied.

After an exciting half-hour of slapping, tearing, blubbing, and shrieking, Nick was exhausted, stark naked, and looked very suspicious to the three police officers who had been watching him with growing concern.

“You’re coming with us,” an officer informed Nick, who obligingly continued to rant nonsense.

“They’re on me, they’re on... Right here see? See! Oh god, they want me to... They want me to quit!” Nick did his best to explain himself to the officers, who seemed equally saddened and amused by his efforts.

“Give me a cigarette.” Nick demanded.

“What did I tell you?” the cherub bellowed as he twisted Nick’s earlobe, which set him into another fit of flailing madness.

Over the course of a three-month psychological evaluation, Nick was diagnosed with, among other things, terminal brain cancer. However, it was not advanced enough to have caused the catatonic breakdown he’d suffered.

After 12 full months in an institution waiting to die, Nick had a lot of time to think. He thought about his life and all the things he wished he had done before he lost his mind. He found it difficult to think though, because the little men had made themselves very comfortable on his shoulders, and the straight jacket he wore did not allow a great deal of leverage for slapping.

“I’m a good man, I didn’t do anything wrong, I don’t deserve this.” Nick wept helplessly.

“Shut up, you... Anyway, it’s getting to be about that time.” said the devil.

“Yeah, been looking forward to this. Glad you came up with this plan, it’s very you.”

“Couldn’t have done it without you on board.”

“Another life, another chance. Maybe this time we’ll get someone worth manipulating. This sonovabitch is worthless,” the cherub said as he ashed his cigar inside of Nick’s ear.

A week later Nicolas Fitzgerald died. After a year without a cigarette, and plenty of crazy-aerobics, his lungs were just healthy enough for transplant. They were placed into a middle-aged man with a wife and four kids.

Six months after his transplant Ward Clifton was feeling better than he had ever felt. Without knowing why, ever since the transplant he had wanted nothing more than to take up smoking. He had never smoked before.

As Ward lit his first cigarette he casually noted a little man sitting on his lapel, smoking.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Nick asked him.