

## End of an affair

### Felix Paul

“There are a couple of things I don’t like about you,” my wife said.

“Go ahead,” I said, lighting a cigarette.

“You quote like a parrot and smoke like a chimney.”

“These are matters I can’t do without,” I said with an indulgent smile. “The quoter,” I proceeded, adding a half-quote from Emerson, “is next to the originator of a good sentence.”

“The smoker,” I went on, quoting Bulwer Lytton this time, “thinks like a sage and acts like a Samaritan.”

“Ignore what Lytton says. Your doctor says you’re smoking yourself sick.”

“Well, I suppose I should ask the doctor to read Robert Burton,” I responded, sending up rings of smoke. “Listen to Burton: ‘Tobacco goes far beyond all panaceas, potable gold and philosopher’s stones; a sovereign remedy to all diseases.’ If the doctor reads him, I’m sure, he’ll not only take to smoking himself, but recommend it to his patients.”

“But daddy,” butted in my six-year-old son, “our miss says it’s bad to smoke.”

“Did she call it bad? How sad! Perhaps she needs to brush up her Shakespeare. Tell her ‘there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.’”

“Look,” shouted my better half, turning very bitter. “You’d better keep your Lyttons, Burtons, Emersons and Shakespeares to yourself. Don’t you ever put your crazy ideas into the little one’s head. You should know I can’t bear to see him grow stupid like his father.”

Before I could quote some authority to defend my wisdom, my wife turned her back on me and sought shelter in the kitchen. Beyond doubt, she was disgusted. I suddenly remembered she had earlier asked me to see the doctor. I thought it a good idea to see the doctor just to placate her.

“You’ve been smoking too much,” said the doctor. “You’d better stop it. Your lungs are in very bad shape.”

“I know as much,” I said, striking a devil-may-care attitude, “and I’m not unhappy about it.” I went on to quote from Hemminger:

Tobacco is a dirty weed; I like it.  
It satisfies no normal need; I like it.  
It makes you thin, it makes you lean.  
It takes your hair right off your bean.  
It's the worst darn stuff I've ever seen; I like it.

The doctor listened to me, feeling helpless and embarrassed. I took leave of him and returned home, feeling triumphant. After all, none on earth could part me from my darling tobacco; neither my wife, nor my doctor, nor any power on earth or in heaven. I told myself that I'd die with the flavour of tobacco in my mouth.

I threw myself on the sofa and reached for my packet of cigarettes on the table. To my surprise, I found it empty. Hadn't I left a few cigarettes in the pack before I went to see the doctor? It didn't matter, however. I would ask my son to get me a new pack.

"Where is Ben?" I said.

"Well, how do I know? Maybe he's upstairs."

I went up. There was Ben squatting in a corner with his back to the door. What the hell was he doing? I stole up to him. He was struggling to light a cigarette.

"How dare you touch this dirty stuff, you brat," I shouted, raising my arm.

"Patience, daddy," said Ben. "After all, 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'"

Never again did I smoke or quote.