A Package of Camels

Don Cressey*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1942 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
AT 10:30 A. M. on January first, 1942, Harry's hand lazily reached out to stop the clamoring of a noisy Baby Ben. It rested for a moment on the smooth cold metal while its owner yawned and concentrated on the luxury of not having to rush to the office. Then automatically it dropped to a spot just five inches to the left of the clock. Every morning for at least three years a package of Camels had lain precisely at that place, and every morning the hand had eagerly grasped the smooth package. But now it felt only the hard varnished top of the bedstand. Slowly at first its long office-white fingers searched almost every inch of the maple surface, then deliberately, hurriedly, covered the entire area again. Suddenly the hand stopped as if it had been caught in an invisible snare, lay quietly for a moment, then slid back into bed with its owner.

"This is the day I quit smoking," Harry reminded himself reluctantly.

As he climbed out of bed and sleepily stumbled across the cold floor toward the closet, he was recalling the hilarious New Year's Eve party at the Chateau Terrace. He remembered how at the stroke of twelve he had ground out his half-smoked cigarette into a saucer, resolved to quit smoking for a year. Mary had laughed at him; Bill had jokingly kept offering cigarettes to him, but he'd refused—this time he was really serious about the resolution.

He stepped into his brown leather slippers and removed a blue dressing gown from its hanger in the closet. Lazily he slipped it on. The instant the belt was fastened his right hand traveled automatically to the breast pocket to search for the
familiar cellophane wrapped package. Diligently it searched, then fell trembling back to the belt.

"Smoking is a matter of the mind," Harry was thinking; "anyone can quit if he just becomes positive that he can do it."

He looked disgustedly at his tux thrown carelessly over the back of a chair, glanced wearily at the reflection of his disheveled hair and whiskered face in the dresser mirror, contemplated shaving, then resignedly began hanging up his formal clothes. His quivering hand brushed a fleck of lint from the collar of the black coat then drew a thin gold cigarette case from its hiding place in the inside pocket. A long-nailed forefinger pressed a little catch and the shiny case popped open, empty.

"Glad I gave 'em to Mary," he thought. "No use having them around now that I've quit."

An hour later Harry set a coffee cup on his mother's kitchen table after having emptied it for the second time. Softly his left hand brushed the outside of his shirt pocket, felt an irregular object through the thin cloth, then eagerly dived in to draw it out. Harry stared at it moodily—a half-used book of matches. He banged the front legs of the chair back to the linoleumed floor, jumped up and stalked out of the kitchen.

"Gotta get some air. Think I'll go downtown after the Register," he called back to his mother.

As he hurried down the street the crispness of the January morning changed his warm breath into tiny puffs of smoke-like fog. At the center of an intersection little spouts of steam from the perforations in a manhole cover rose like thin columns of smoke into the brisk winter air. Harry glanced contemptuously at a vivacious young girl in a ski suit who was declaring, from a signboard across the street, that she would walk a mile for a Camel. The sharp tang of tobacco smoke floated from a pedestrian's time-worn briar. He smiled smugly at his own release from the offensive habit. But his hands groped searchingly through his pockets.

A half-block farther down the almost deserted street Harry stopped to examine a mammoth display of pipes and smokers' supplies in a drugstore window. Photographs of soldiers, sailors, athletes, businessmen, and aviators, all puffing deliciously on pipes or cigarettes, smiled out at him. In the far left corner a dozen green, Christmas-wrapped cartons of cigarettes were scattered at the base of an artificial fir tree. From between an array
of blue tobacco tins and glimmering cigarette cases a red and white sign beamed its message. "Smoke Chesterfields. They Satisfy." Slowly Harry turned to the door, hesitated a moment with his hand on the latch, then sauntered in.

"Register," he said to the spectacled little man at the counter. A quarter jingled on the coin-scarred, glass case. The newspaper rustled softly as Harry took it from the counter, folded it carefully and thrust it into his overcoat pocket.

"Anything else?"

The inside of Harry's mouth was uncomfortably hot and dry. Tiny drops of perspiration gleamed from his frowning forehead. Slowly his office-white hand rose to pass lightly over his parched lips, hesitated for a moment on his chin, then dropped to the counter, palm upward.

"Oh, yeah, and—and a package of Camels."

---

**And Spring Came**

William Craig  
Arch. E. So.

He said, "Let the earth be  
With beauty upon it,  
And men that may see,  
May hear and enjoy it."

And spring came.

And men grew restless  
And quarreled and fought,  
And killed each other—  
Earth's beauty forgot!

And spring came.

And He said, "Why  
Should beauty be gone?  
I'll let men die,  
And beauty live on."

And spring came.