

The Cigarette Case

Gdańsk, Poland. The 90s.

Kazimierz found the cigarette case one morning on a bench as he walked his usual route through the park to the shipyard, where he worked as a painter. In the gloom, the ugly outlines of creaking cranes loomed, resembling sick birds, and the smell of dampness and rotting autumn leaves seemed to crawl directly into his soul, causing fits of melancholy.

Kazimierz looked around and, seeing no one nearby, picked up the case from the rain-soaked bench. It was silver, looked simple—without inscriptions or engravings. On the move, Kazimierz opened it and saw that it was full.

— O kurwa! — Kazimierz exclaimed with joy. — O kurwa! To dobrze!

He was genuinely happy about the find: his cigarettes had run out yesterday, and Kazimierz desperately wanted a smoke. He took out a filter cigarette with no inscriptions, sniffed it, and, after making sure it was tobacco, lit it and took a greedy drag. His head swam, and with a sigh of relief, he exhaled the smoke, noting that the tobacco was excellent. Pleased, feeling as if on wings, Kazimierz hurried to the gate to make it to his shift on time.

The rusty wind beat against the walls of the smoking area when the crew came out for their afternoon break.

— Got a smoke, Kazimierz? — his partner Tadeusz asked, coughing terribly and spitting up yellow phlegm. — We'll smoke mine tomorrow.

— Here, — Kazimierz said, opening the case and offering him a cigarette.

— Wow, good tobacco, — Tadeusz said, taking a drag, and again went into a fit of coughing, exhaling smoke.

— Kurwa mać, this painting work will be the end of me, I'll cough up my lungs, — Tadeusz rasped glumly.

Kazimierz remained silent. He knew about the harm, but he continued to go to this job, as if chained, just like all the other laborers. He saw their thoughts on their faces in the morning and knew what they were thinking when they walked home from work.

The next morning, Kazimierz, as always, woke up earlier than anyone else and left while his son and wife were still asleep. Coffee and a cigarette on an empty stomach were his loyal morning friends. And, opening the case, he saw that it was full again.

— Matko Boska!, that can't be! — Kazimierz exclaimed and began to carefully examine the case and the cigarettes. Nothing unusual. But he couldn't believe his eyes and tore up one cigarette: it looked like tobacco, good tobacco, and the smell was right.

— Fine, — he said, snapping the case shut and finding no explanation for what had happened. He lit up, sipping his coffee, looking out the window, and thinking about the miracles that still happen in this world.

So several days passed, and every morning the case was full. Kazimierz, offering the foreman a cigarette in the morning, asked about Tadeusz.

— I called his wife, Agnieszka, last night, — the foreman replied. — She said he died. First, he started throwing up blood, and then he coughed up his lungs into the sink. The ambulance didn't make it.

— Jezu Chryste... — Kazimierz whispered, his blood running cold, and stepped away. He understood that the case was the cause. The very one from which he had been handing out cigarettes left and right. "Who's next?" — Kazimierz thought with horror. After smoking down to the filter and burning his fingers, he immediately lit the next one.

— Heard the news, Kazimierz? — the workers asked in the smoking area.

— What news? — he asked, growing cold inside.

— Waldek, our grinder, died. He choked on phlegm in his sleep. How did he manage that?..

Kazimierz shrugged indifferently and, without another word, went back to work.

Over the next few months, a series of accidents and fatal illnesses wiped out almost the entire old crew of their shift. Only Kazimierz and a few other guys who didn't smoke were left. Just yesterday, after work, when Kazimierz offered a cigarette to a new guy, the man died in a crash, his head hitting the dash as his car swerved into oncoming traffic. The cause of the accident was a cigarette that had fallen onto the seat.

Maybe the cigarette case wasn't forgotten or lost, but left there on purpose? Maybe someone before couldn't bear the weight and got rid of it that way?

These thoughts swirled in Kazimierz's head as he stood early in the morning in that same gloomy park at the familiar bench. He thought: it's time to leave it, to throw it away for good, enough!

At the same time, he rationalized it to himself: now he was more careful — he only offered cigarettes from the case to random passersby. For his own, he had a regular pack.

— Tomorrow... I'll throw it away tomorrow, — Kazimierz promised himself and hurried to work, knowing deep down that this "tomorrow" would never come.

That night, his son woke up, needing to use the toilet. Returning, he noticed the edge of the cigarette case sticking out of his father's jacket pocket. Listening—everyone was asleep—he quietly and carefully pulled out two cigarettes for himself and a friend.

"Well, even if Dad notices, what's he gonna do? Spank me?" — the boy thought.

Chuckling, pleased with his mischief, he went back to bed.

The End

18.09.25

Vladislav