

Thank You For Smoking

screenplay by
Jason Reitman

from the novel by
Christopher Buckley

7/9/2004

Room 9 Entertainment
10635 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 320
Los Angeles, CA. 90025
(310) 475-3700

INT. THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW SET - DAY

Oprah Winfrey, a woman who calls no one boss, stands before her audience. Not just the hundred or so people that have waited in line to sit in her presence. Moreover, the millions of people who will devour each and every word that leaves her lips as soon as the red light atop STUDIO CAMERA A turns on.

Sounds daunting. You and I couldn't do it in a million years. This, however, is what she was born to do.

The RED LIGHT bursts on and without flinching, she says...

OPRAH

A couple years ago, RJR Nabisco, the company that makes Camel cigarettes, was forced by a Supreme Court Injunction to discontinue the use of the character known as Joe Camel, due to its clear connection with teen smoking. However, many now feel that this is not enough. The question we continue to face is 'What will it take to get kids off cigarettes?'

A LOGO with the last sentence appears on screen.

We move across the PANELISTS as Oprah introduces them, in between bursts of applause.

OPRAH

I want to introduce you to Sue Maclean, head of the National Organization of Mothers Against Smoking.

(applause)

Francis Gyverson is the executive director of the National Teachers's Association in Washington.

(applause)

Ron Goode is an aide to Senator Finisterre of Vermont who is leading the political battle on cigarettes.

(to Ron)

Does that make you a colonel?

RON

Just a foot soldier, Oprah.

More applause. Oprah stops at a fifteen year old boy named ROBIN, whose bald head is obviously not a fashion statement.

OPRAH

Robin Williger is a fifteen year old freshman from Racine, Wisconsin. He likes studying history and he's on the debate team. Robin's future looked bright, however recently, he was diagnosed with Cancer. A very tough kind of Cancer. Robin tells me he has quit smoking though and no longer thinks cigarettes are cool.

Thunderous applause.

Oprah stops in front of NICK NAYLOR... our hero.

OPRAH

Nick Naylor is the Vice President of the Academy of Tobacco Studies. They are the tobacco industry's main lobby in Washington, DC and Mr. Naylor is their chief spokesman.

(to Nick)

Thank you for coming Nick.

Silence.

NICK (V.O.)

Few people on this planet know what it is to be truly despised.

The scene FREEZES as we switch to Nick's POV of the CROWD. This is a very angry bunch of people. As we pass the FROZEN CROWD, we see PEOPLE: mid-scream, mid-spit, mid-gesture.

NICK (V.O.)

Can you blame them? I earn a living fronting an organization that kills one thousand two hundred human beings a day. Twelve Hundred People. We're talking two jumbo jet planeloads a day of men, women, and children. I mean there's Caesar, Alexander the Great, and me...

FLASH IMAGES (under previous dialogue): 1. CAESAR in the Coliseum 2. ALEXANDER THE GREAT, tromping over the carcasses of his enemies 3. NICK NAYLOR, holding out a light with a smile, framed by the AMERICAN FLAG.

NICK (V.O.)
 ...Nick Naylor. The face of cigarettes.
 The Colonel Sanders of Nicotine.

CUT TO:

EXT. ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

A collegiate style brick building with no distinct features,
 featuring a yellow sign: THE ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES

NICK (V.O.)
 This is where I work. The Academy of
 Tobacco Studies. It was established by
 seven gentlemen you may recognize from C-
 Span...

FLASH IMAGES: The seven Tobacco CEO's testifying in Congress.

NICK (V.O.)
 These guys realized quick, if they were
 going to claim that cigarettes were not
 addictive, they better have proof...

INT. LAB - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

ERHARDT VON GRUPPEN-MUNDT, an older scientist who "escaped"
 from Germany. His lapel reads "scientist-in-residence". He
 signals a lab tech who presses a button on a machine linked
 to a glass cage of mice. Immediately, it fills with smoke.

NICK (V.O.)
 This is the man they rely on, Erhardt Von
 Gruppen-Mundt. They found him in Germany.
 I won't go into the details. He's been
 testing the link between nicotine and
 lung cancer for thirty years and hasn't
 found any conclusive results. The man is
 a genius. He could disprove gravity.

INT. LAW LIBRARY - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Twenty KILLER LAWYERS sit around a conference table,
 devouring law books and journals.

NICK (V.O.)
 Then, we've got our sharks. We draft them
 out of Ivy League law schools and give
 them sports cars and time shares. It's
 just like a John Grisham novel without
 all the espionage.

INT. PUBLIC RELATIONS - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

A mix of red and yellow wood paneling makes the place actually look like a cigarette carton.

NICK (V.O.)

Most importantly, we've got spin control. That's where I come in. I get paid to talk. I don't have an MD or a law degree. I've got a bachelors in kicking ass and taking names.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

Nick's head turns towards us in SLO-MO. As his mouth opens to speak, we ramp into SUPER-SPEED, sending his mouth to 100 WPS (words per second). Nick expels syllables like bullets to the sound of an M-16 emptying a full clip.

NICK (V.O.)

You know that guy who can pick up any girl?

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

Nick is at the plate in rolled up sleeves and a tie. He clicks the bat against his loafers. There's the pitch. He swings, connects, home run.

NICK (V.O.)

I'm him on crack.

BACK TO:

INT. OPRAH WINFREY SHOW SOUND STAGE - DAY

OPRAH

Who'd like to start?

Nick raises his hand, bringing uncertainty to his fellow panelists and Oprah alike.

NICK

Is it all right if I smoke?

Gasps all around.

OPRAH

You want to smoke?

NICK

Well, it's traditional at firing squads
to offer the condemned a last cigarette.

Silence... then a laugh... then a few more laughs... even
Oprah begins to chuckle. Pretty soon the whole audience is
laughing.

SUE

I'm sorry, but I don't think that's
funny.

RON

I have to agree. I don't see the humor in
it. And I suspect Robin Williger doesn't
either.

Whip to Robin for reaction... but Cancer Kid is laughing.
Nick is beside himself. He smiles as if he just became a
father.

Nick looks back to Mr. Ron Goode with renewed confidence.

Nick attacks.

NICK

(to Ron)

Oh, why don't you leave him alone and
stop trying to tell him how he ought to
feel.

(to Oprah)

This is typical of the attitude of the
federal government. It's this same
attitude that brought us Prohibition,
Vietnam, and fifty years of living on the
brink of nuclear destruction.

(pointing to Ron)

But for a member of the government to
come on this show and lecture about
cancer, when the same government for the
last sixty years has been producing
atomic bombs, twenty-five thousand of
them, capable of giving every man, woman,
and child on this planet cancer so awful,
so ghastly, so untreatable, that medical
science doesn't even have a name for them
yet, is just beneath contempt.

RON

Beneath contempt? This from the man whose
paycheck is signed by big tobacco.

(MORE)

RON(CONT'D)

This from the man who will profit off
Robin Williger's death.

NICK

Oprah, how on earth would "Big Tobacco"
profit off of the loss of this young man?
I hate to think in such callous terms,
but if anything we'd be losing a
customer. It's not only our hope but it's
in our best interests to keep Robin alive
and smoking.

RON

That's ludicrous!

NICK

Let me tell you something Oprah, and let
me share something with the fine,
concerned people in the audience today.
The Ron Goode's of this world want the
Robin Willigers to die.

RON

What?!

NICK

(Holds Robin's shoulder)

Awful, but true. I'm sorry, but it's a
fact. And do you know why? I'll tell you
why. So that their *budgets* will go up.
This is nothing less than trafficking in
human misery, and you, sir, ought to be
ashamed of yourself.

(back to audience)

Of course the Academy does not condone
underage smoking, or drinking and driving
for that matter, for the simple reason
that they are against the law.

(time for the ammo)

As a matter of fact, we're about to
launch... a fifty-million-dollar campaign
aimed at persuading kids not to smoke.

OPRAH

And with that, we'll take a short break.
Hang on, their's much more to come.

TECHNICIAN

And we're out!

CUT TO:

EXT. OPRAH WINFREY THEATRE - CHICAGO - DAY

Nick steps out of a backstage door onto the sidewalk and into a waiting LIMOUSINE, while answering his ringing CELL PHONE in one movement.

INT. LIMOUSINE - SAME

Nick is swallowed by the plush black leather.

NICK
(answering phone)
Yes?

CONTINUE INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BR'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

BR, Nick's boss and a real shit kicker, fumes into the receiver.

BR (O.S.)
Fifty million dollars... are you out of
your fucking mind?!

NICK (V.O.)
Everyone has a boss... BR just happens to
be mine.

FLASH TO:

INT. SQUASH COURT - DAY

NICK (V.O.)
He came from the vending machine world.
This made him tough.

BR enters the court and begins to hit the ball. He is a tall man with strong features in his forties. Stained headband.

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The name, BR, came from his tour in
Vietnam. The five people who know it's
meaning are all dead.

BR is at full speed. He slams his opponent into the wall.

BACK TO:

INT. BR'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - CONTINUED

BR

The deal was five million.

NICK

Five million dollars will buy you a couple subway posters. It's not going to impress anyone.

BR

That's the idea, Nick.

NICK

You'll be thanking me soon. This will probably get you great press.

BR

I got to call the Captain and see if this is going to fly. Get your ass back to DC.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DAY

A BOEING 767 takes flight.

INT. BOEING 767 - DAY

We hover over FIRST CLASS, but Nick isn't there.

NICK (V.O.)

Could I afford to sit in First?

Still hovering over the cabin we begin to move towards the tail of the plane.

NICK (V.O.)

Of course I could.

We cross into BUSINESS CLASS.

NICK (V.O.)

Business Class? Hell, I could just bump up. I've got enough frequent flyer miles to ride in the cockpit.

We cross into COACH.

NICK (V.O.)

I like to ride with the people.

We stop on the worst seat in the plane. Center Seat. Five rows from the back. Nick is crammed in between a college baseball team in uniform.

NICK (V.O.)

Know your clients. My people cram themselves into a tiny seat, take a Xanax and dream of the moment they can stuff their face with fresh tobacco.

The Team starts tossing around a ball. Nick is unfazed.

NICK (V.O.)

If I can convince just one of these kids to pick up smoking, I've paid for my flight round trip.

Nick greets the kid next to him.

CUT TO:

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Dark. Especially the corner that Nick's table occupies. Nick is seated with his closest friends. The only people who understand. BOBBY JAY BLISS, a larger than life gun advocate from Loober, Mississippi and POLLY BAILEY, an attractive alcohol lobbyist with a quick tongue.

NICK (V.O.)

Once a week, we'll meet here at Bert's. Together, we represent the chief spokespeople for the Tobacco, Alcohol, and Firearms industries. We call ourselves the Mod Squad. M-O-D. Merchants of Death.

Bobby Jay into his cell phone.

BOBBY JAY

(on phone)
Perfect.

Bobby Jay hangs up.

POLLY

Perfect, what could be perfect?

NICK

Did they legalize grenade launchers for hunting?

BOBBY JAY

Yesterday, we had another disgruntled postman. Halfway through Sunday mass, he blasted the minister clear out of the pulpit, and then trained withering fire on the choir. He's on the run. State wide man hunt.

FREEZE on Bobby Jay as he takes a big bite of his battered fried shrimp.

NICK (V.O.)

Bobby Jay works for SAFETY. The Society for the Advancement of Firearms and Effective Training of Youth. Formerly the National Right to Bear Arms Committee.

FLASH IMAGE: Bobby Jay's HEADSHOT, standing with the SAFETY seal and an American flag, in camouflage, holding a rifle.

NICK (V.O.)

Following the Kent State shootings, Bobby Jay, then seventeen, signed up for the National Guard, so that he too could shoot college students...
...But the National Guard recruiter was out to lunch so Bobby Jay joined the army and ended up shooting Vietnamese instead...

FLASH IMAGE: Bobby Jay steps out of the jungle in full camo, shouldering an M-60.

NICK

...which was almost as good as college students, only they shot back.

Bobby Jay takes a SHOT in the arm. He looks confused.

BACK TO:

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

NICK

Assault rifle?

BOBBY JAY

Probably, but, these days everything is considered an assault rifle. Hell, my nephew's BB gun is an "assault rifle".

POLLY

(somber)

It is a very unspecific world.

BOBBY JAY

Of course, within the hour, I got the Washington Post calling me on the phone. Godless swine! I said to them, when a plane crashes on account of pilot error do you blame the Boeing Corporation?

NICK

That's good.

BOBBY JAY

When some booze-besotten drunk goes and runs someone down, do you go banging on the door of General Motors?

POLLY

Tell me you didn't say that.

FREEZE ON POLLY

NICK (V.O.)

Polly works for The Moderation Council, formerly the National Association for Alcoholic Beverages.

FLASH IMAGE - Polly's HEADSHOT shows her surrounded by men in bad suits, each pointing various bottles of alcohol at her.

NICK (V.O.)

The liquor industry has been using women to sell its product since time began...

FLASH IMAGE - Really Sexist Beer Ad: Larry Flynt would blush.

NICK (V.O.)

... Only recently however did they hire a woman like Polly to pitch public policy...

FLASH IMAGE - Polly at a press conference.

NICK (V.O.)

... The sight of her challenging the latest government report on alcohol-related car crashes made you want to... well, grab a beer.

Polly brushes hair back over her shoulder as we go...

BACK TO:

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - CONTINUED

NICK
(turns to Polly)
How does your day stack up?

POLLY
The Michigan State Supreme Court ruled
that sobriety roadblocks were
unconstitutional.

NICK
Party down.

BOBBY JAY
You know you can beat a breathalyzer by
sucking on activated charcoal tablets.

POLLY
Well perhaps we should change our
campaign to "If you must drink and drive,
suck charcoal."

NICK
Don't the police wonder why you're
sucking on charcoal.

BOBBY JAY
There's no law against charcoal.

ALL THREE
YET!

Nick looks at his watch and stands immediately.

NICK
Got to go.

EXT. SAINT EUTHANASIUS MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Nick comes screeching up in his BMW 540.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Nick sits on a short school bench with a LARGE UNMARKED
CARDBOARD BOX. A TEACHER opens a door and sticks her head out.

TEACHER

Mr. Naylor, it's time.

Nick stands and fixes his tie.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Joey is such a bright young man. We all look forward to him coming out of his shell a little. He's a bit shy.

NICK

He gets that from his mother.

The teacher lets out a little "oh".

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A BANNER hung across the chalkboard reads: "WHAT DO YOU DO?" Nick enters the classroom and smiles to his son, JOEY (12), who tries to smile back, but comes across, well... terrified.

Nick sets his cardboard box down on the teacher's desk and slices it open with a pair of black handled school scissors. He then proceeds down the aisle with his box, handing each student... a JOE CAMEL PLUSH TOY.

NICK

Here you go... One each... Enjoy...

The teacher's jaw drops. Nick gets to his son's desk.

JOEY

(whispering)

Please don't ruin my childhood.

Nick nods reassuringly, then proceeds to the next desk.

After finishing the class, Nick returns to the front and drops the box. He takes in a breath, trying to swallow all the oxygen in the room. Then he begins:

NICK

How many of you want to be lawyers when you grow up?

One hand. A real prick of a kid.

NICK

How about movie stars?

Almost every hand in the room goes up.

NICK
How about lobbyists?

KID 1
What's that?

NICK
It's kind of like being in the movies.
It's what I do. I talk for a living.

KID 2
What do you talk about?

NICK
I speak on behalf of cigarettes.

Gasps around the room. Joey looks around in growing fear.

KID 3
My mom used to smoke. She says that
cigarettes kill.

NICK
(to Kid 3)
Really? Is your mom a doctor?

KID 3
No.

NICK
(to Kid 3)
A scientific researcher of some kind?

KID 3
No.

NICK
Well, she doesn't exactly sound like a
credible expert now does she?

Kid 3 sinks in his seat.

NICK
Don't feel bad. It's okay to listen to
your mom.
(winking at Joey)
I mean, it's good to listen to your
parents.
(to the class)
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

All I'm suggesting is that there will always be people trying to tell you what to do and what to think. There probably already are people doing that. Am I right?

Nods across the classroom. The teacher is a little skittish.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm here to say that when someone tries to act like some sort of expert, you can respond, "who says?"

KID 4

So cigarettes are good for you?

TEACHER

(quickly)

No...

NICK

... No, that's not what I'm getting at. My point is you have to think for yourself.

(bangs a desk)

Challenge authority!

A couple kids gasp.

NICK (CONT'D)

If your parents told you that chocolate was dangerous, would you just take their words for it?

THE WHOLE CLASS

Noooo.

NICK

Exactly. So, perhaps instead of acting like sheep, when it comes to cigarettes, you should find out for yourself.

TEACHER

(steps in front of Nick)

Okay, then... Thank you Mr. Naylor for joining us...

Joey and his dad meet eyes. Nick gives a little, "How'd I do?" motion. Joey looks back and sighs.

EXT. PARKING LOT, JOEY'S SCHOOL - DAY

Nick and Joey approach the BMW. Joey is not pleased.

JOEY

Didn't mom tell you not to come?

NICK

Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss this for the world.

JOEY

Sure. Any opportunity to embarrass me.

NICK

I think some kids in the back liked it.

JOEY

Those are the kids who steal my lunch money.

NICK

Come on, Joey. I only get to see you once a month. Let's try to enjoy ourselves.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NICK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nick and Joey sit at opposite ends of the DINING ROOM TABLE, doing their respective homework.

Nick is HIGHLIGHTING lines from various briefs.

Joey is trying to write an essay. Pencil on paper. Joey stops for a moment. He looks up at his father.

JOEY

Dad, why is American government, the best government?

NICK

(without looking)

Because of our endless appeals system.

Joey goes back to writing. Nick suddenly looks up and realizes what he's done.

NICK

Joey, you're not writing what I just said, are you?

Joey nods YES.

NICK
Stop for a second.

Joey drops his pencil.

NICK
What is the subject of your essay?

JOEY
Why is the American government the best government in the world?

NICK
Your teacher crafted that question?

JOEY
Yeah. Why?

NICK
Well, for the moment, I'll look past the obvious problems in syntax and focus more on the core of the question.

Joey rolls his eyes. He's heard this before.

NICK (CONT'D)
I mean, A. Does America have the best government? and B. What constitutes a best government? Crime? Poverty? Literacy? in America? Definitely not best. Perhaps not even better than most.
(however)
We do have a very entertaining government.

JOEY
Dad?

NICK
Sorry.
(back to being a father)
Joey, are you familiar with the term, B.S.?

JOEY
(matter of fact)
Bullshit?

NICK
Yes. Exactly. B.S., if I may, is what questions like the one your teacher posed are made for.

(MORE)

NICK(CONT'D)

Even if America had the best government,
there'd be no way to prove it in... how
many pages are you writing?

JOEY

Two pages.

NICK

Definitely not in two pages.

JOEY

So what am I supposed to write?

NICK

Whatever you want.

JOEY

(elaborate)

Okay?

NICK

Write about America's amazing ability to
make profit by breaking down trading
tariffs and bringing American jobs to
third world countries or how good we are
at executing felons. They're all correct
answers.

JOEY

I can do that?

NICK

Oh Joey, that's the beauty of argument.
If you argue correctly, you're never
wrong.

A whole new world opens in Joey's eyes.

Nick goes back to his work.

JOEY

Dad, if I finish the essay within an
hour, can we stay up all night?

NICK

(without looking up)

That's a negotiation, not an argument.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Nick intently watches THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA. Joey has already
fallen asleep next to him.

On TV - John Wayne, having brought his men through hell to victory, gives them the post game speech.

JOHN WAYNE

...I never felt so good in my life. How about a cigarette?

Just as he's offering the pack around to his men, a Japanese sniper drills him, dead.

Without realizing it, Nick takes out a cigarette PACK. He reaches for a smoke, but the pack is empty. Nick looks back at John Wayne, then back at his Cigarette Pack. Nick smiles. He's got something.

EXT. BEAUTIFUL SUBURBAN COTTAGE - MONDAY MORNING

Nick pulls up to the curb in front of the house.

NICK (V.O.)

This was the first house I ever bought.

Nick and Joey walk up to the door. It opens, revealing Nick's ex-wife JILL. Joey scurries past his mother into the house.

JILL

You still own a watch, don't you Nick?

Nick waits for the end of this insult.

JILL

Eight O'Clock is when the little hand is pointing directly at eight.

NICK

Jill, I can't help feeling that Joey is getting the wrong idea about his father. It would be great if I could spend a little more time with him. You know, to give him a fair and balanced perspective.

JILL

Nick, you had plenty of time to be his father. Now you're his weekend guardian.

NICK

He still needs a father.

On cue, BRAD steps through the door between them. Brad is Nick's taller and broader replacement. He's an MD, and he's wearing the WHITE COAT and BADGE to prove it.

BRAD
Nick, you got a second?

NICK
Sure, Brad.

Brad walks Nick back to his car.

BRAD
Nick, your job and everything aside, I hope you understand that second hand smoke is a real killer.

NICK
What are you talking about?

BRAD
I just hope you keep Joey in a smoke free environment. That's all I'm saying.

NICK
Brad, I'm his father. You're the guy fucking his mom.

Nick gets into his car.

BRAD
That's just unnecessary.

CUT TO:

C-SPAN

A press conference is happening at the LUNG ASSOCIATION. The man at the podium is SENATOR FINISTIRRE and by the chyron along the bottom of the screen, we can see he is a (D) from Vermont. The man has villain written all over him. He could star in the video, "*When Liberals Attack!*"

FINISTIRRE
Tobacco is winning the war. The war on our children. They like to use symbols and cartoons to get our kids hooked. Well, we have a symbol of our own...

On TV: Finistirre pulls back a curtain, revealing a SKULL AND CROSSBONES.

FINISTIRRE

It is my hope that by the end of the year, all cigarette packages sold in the United States will carry this emblem. Perhaps then cigarettes will finally be labeled appropriately - as poison. I will be holding a congressional hearing to discuss the inclusion of the skull and crossbones in two weeks time. As usual, I send an open invitation to Big Tobacco to come and join us. Perhaps, this time they will grace us with their presence and their answers.

Flashbulbs. Commotion.

We pop out of the screen to reveal we are in...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

The Spin Control team sits around the long oval table. Somewhere in the middle sits Nick. His eyelids drop to half mast in reaction to the video.

NICK (V.O.)

Prick.

BR freezes the MONITOR on Finistirre's clammy face. He then grabs the top of the conference table with his opens palms.

The fifteen or so people in suits prepare for a beating.

BR

People. What is going on out there? I look down this table, and all I see are white flags. Our numbers are down all across the board. Teen smoking, our bread and butter, is falling like a shit from heaven. We don't sell Tic-Tacs for Christ's sakes. We sell cigarettes. And they're cool, and available, and addictive. The job is almost done for us.

(pointing back to Finistirre's frozen face)

This "environmentalist"...

As BR says this, the word "PUSSY" appears below as a translation.

BR

... is challenging us. We have to have an answer.

(MORE)

BR(CONT'D)

I'm asking you - When this cocksucker puts Captain Hook on our product, what are we going to do?

NICK

BR?

BR

Yeah, Nick?

NICK

If I may?

BR gives the look of *By all means, impress me.*

Nick stands and begins to circle the large table.

NICK

In 1910 the US was producing ten billion cigarettes a year. By 1930, we were up to one hundred twenty three billion. What happened in between?

Blank stares all around.

NICK

Three things. A World War. Dieting. And Movies.

BR

Movies?

NICK

1927. Talking pictures are born. Suddenly directors need to give their actors something to do when they're talking. Cary Grant and Carole Lombard are lighting up. Bette Davis - a chimney. And Bogart! Remember the first picture with him and Lauren Bacall?

BR

Not specifically.

NICK

(imitating Bacall)

She sort of shimmies in through the doorway, nineteen years old, pure sex. She says, "Anybody got a match?"

(back to being Nick)

And Bogie throws the matches at her...

Nick tosses a book of matches to an attractive young lobbyist.

NICK

...And she catches them. Greatest romance of the century and how did it start? Lighting a cigarette.
 (switches gears)
 These days when someone smokes in a movie, they're either a psychopath or...
 (even worse)
 ... European.

Nick goes in for the kill.

NICK

The message Hollywood needs to send out is, *Smoking is Cool*. We need the cast of *Will & Grace* smoking in their living room. Forrest Gump puffing away between his box of chocolates. Hugh Grant earning back the love of Julia Roberts by buying her favorite brand... *her Virginia Slims*. Most of the actors smoke already. If they start doing it on screen, we can put the sex back into cigarettes.

Nick feels like taking a bow, but he'll settle for a seat.

BR

Well, it's a thought. I was hoping for something a little more inspiring, but at least you're thinking. People, slam your fucking brains against your desks until something useful comes out.

BR stands and the meeting is over.

As people leave, BR motions to Nick.

BR

Nick, you've been summoned. The Captain wants to see you.

NICK

He saw Oprah?

BR nods.

NICK

What did he think?

BR

Get your ass on the next flight to
Winston-Salem.

CUT TO:

IN-FLIGHT SAFETY VIDEO

An animation of a 757 zooms by computer clouds.

COMFORTING FEMALE ANNCR (V.O.)

*Thank you for reviewing the safety
features of this Boeing 757.*

Still in video, we cut into the cabin, where we find... Nick.

COMFORTING FEMALE ANNCR (V.O.)

*If the cabin begins to fill with smoke,
oxygen masks will drop from above.*

Yellow oxygen masks drop from overhead.

COMFORTING FEMALE ANNCR (V.O.)

*Place the mask over your head and fasten
it with the outside straps.*

Still in video, Nick places the mask over his head.

COMFORTING FEMALE ANNCR (V.O.)

*Do not be alarmed by the presence of
smoke in the cabin. Truth be told, all
studies showing the harms of smoke
inhalation are pure conjecture.*

Nick looks up in confusion.

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. BOEING 757 - COACH - NIGHT

Nick twitches awake from what was apparently a dream. He sips
his V8 and returns to some reading.

NICK (V.O.)

The Captain is one of the last great men
of tobacco. The man is a legend. He
introduced filters when cigarettes first
got slammed by Reader's Digest.

INT. HALLWAY, BEST WESTERN - WINSTON-SALEM - MORNING

We push down a long curved hallway with bad carpet.

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The Captain later founded the Academy of Tobacco Studies. Although I've never met him, I guess you could say he's the father I never knew.

One door opens. Nick steps out in sweats and picks up the local newspaper, the Winston-Salem Journal, at his feet.

The cover reads:

OUR HERO;

Tobacco Spokesman Nick Naylor

Lets Government Have It

Nick smiles.

NICK (V.O.)

You got to love Winston-Salem.

INT. TOBACCO CLUB, WINSTON-SALEM - DAY

One word: mahogany.

Your typical men's club, only wall-to-wall posters of classic cigarette advertisements and a constant six foot smog layer from smoke exhalation.

Nick is examining one of the old posters.

HOST

Mr. Naylor?

Nick turns around.

HOST

The Captain will see you now.

INT. MAIN DINING ROOM - THE TOBACCO CLUB - SAME

Nick follows the host through the smoke filled room of men.

NICK (V.O.)

The Club was founded by the Tobacco Barons in 1890, so they would have a place to get away from their wives. In Winston-Salem, feminism is the practice of not beating your spouse unless she really deserves it.

The host leads Nick to a table. Seated at which is a man that could only be described as Colonel Sanders. This is the CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN

Nick, my boy. Just in time for mud.

Nick sits down as a WAITER arrives with MINT JULEPS.

Both take sips and "aaah".

CAPTAIN

Do you know the secret to a *really* good julep? Crush the mint down onto the ice with your thumb and grind it in. Release the menthol.

(demonstrates)

Do you know who taught me that?

Nick shrugs "no".

CAPTAIN

Fidel Castro.

The Captain takes another sip.

CAPTAIN

Nick, do you remember Nineteen-Fifty-Two?

NICK

Sir, I wasn't alive in Nineteen-Fifty-Two.

CAPTAIN

Good Lord. I was in Korea shooting Chinese in Nineteen-Fifty-Two.

NICK

(not a question)

Really.

CAPTAIN

Today, they're our best customer.

(chuckle)

(MORE)

CAPTAIN(CONT'D)

Next time, we won't have to shoot so many of'em, will we?

The waiter appears with another round of Juleps.

CAPTAIN

Nineteen-Fifty-Two was the year Readers Digest nailed us with the whole health... aspect. As Churchill said, That was perhaps *the end of our beginning*.

The Captain takes a long sip.

CAPTAIN

Do you enjoy your current work, Nick?

NICK

Yes, it's challenging. If you can do Tobacco, you can do anything.

CAPTAIN

You kind of struggled before this.

NICK

Yes, briefly.

CAPTAIN

It's one of the reasons we hired you.

Nick looks up in disbelief ("really?").

CAPTAIN

Nothing pushes a man harder than the need to rewrite his own obituary.

Nick ponders this as he sips his Mint Julip.

CAPTAIN

You know Nick, you remind me just a little bit of myself when I was your age.

NICK

Thank you sir.

CAPTAIN

Tell me, what is your opinion of BR?

NICK

BR is... my boss.

CAPTAIN

I like to think that I'm your boss, son. But I do admire loyalty in a man. I can forgive almost anything in a man if he's loyal. Like that Oprah show you did. You could have given up, cried and apologized, but you stayed loyal. And you gave it to that son'v'a bitch good.

NICK

Thank you sir.

CAPTAIN

BR's come under the idea that we should start bribing Producers in Hollywood to make their actors smoke on screen.

It takes every part of Nick's strength to not verbally dismantle BR right there and then.

NICK

Say, that's a great idea.

CAPTAIN

Smart man, that BR.

NICK

Oh yeah, and loyal.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE US CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

There she stands, one of the most powerful structures in the world. Think how many laws are being broken inside right now.

CUT TO:

SENATOR FINISTIRRE'S DOOR:

SENATOR FINISTIRRE (D) VERMONT

As we push in, we begin to hear a conversation from inside...

FINISTIRRE (O.S.)

Ron, have a seat...

INT. SENATOR FINISTIRRE'S OFFICE - DAY

As you imagined: Oak DESK, US and Vermont FLAGS, assorted DOCUMENTS on the walls, a picture of McCarthy (not really).

Senator FINISTIRRE is interrogating a very sweaty Ron Goode.

FINISTIRRE

You see Ron, I can't be everywhere I'm needed. That's why I send people like you to speak on my behalf. When you're there, you're not Ron Goode, the guy your friends may like. You're Senator Finistirre's Aide and your name really doesn't matter. So when Ron Goode is a complete asshole on the Oprah Winfrey show... I am being an asshole on the Oprah Winfrey show.

RON

Senator, sir, he just sprang on me like an animal. I couldn't get a word in.

FINISTIRRE

Where the hell did you find cancer boy?

RON

He was supposed to be very reliable. The Lung Association was one of his references.

FINISTIRRE

(to himself)

Fucking non-profits.

(back to Ron)

When you're looking for a cancer kid, he should be hopeless. He should have a wheelchair. He should have trouble speaking. He should have a pet goldfish that he carries around in a little ziplock bag. Hopeless. He should not have a sense of humor.

RON

I apologize Senator. But if it wasn't for Nick Naylor...

FINISTIRRE

Nick Naylor? Don't even think of using that as an excuse. The man shills bullshit for a living. You work for a fucking Senator. A Senator who is supposed to be tough on Tobacco. Have a little pride.

(thinks of something)

Come here.

RON
I'm sorry?

FINISTIRRE
Come here.

Ron stands up and steps up to the desk. Finistirre grabs Ron's TIE with one hand, then with the other grabs a SHARPIE off his desk and proceeds to write something on Ron's FOREHEAD.

When Ron finally leans back and reveals, written above his eyes is the word "ASSHOLE".

FINISTIRRE
Get out of my office.
(additional thought)
And when you look in the mirror, don't forget to read it backwards.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CAPTAIN'S LIMO - DAY

Nick and the Captain sit across from each other.

CAPTAIN
A President once said 'The torch is passed to a new generation.' He was talking about my generation. Now it's coming the time to pass it to you. You ready for the torch, Nick?

NICK
The torch?

CAPTAIN
It won't be easy. It's a hostile world.
(almost to himself)
Sometimes I feel like a Columbian Drug Dealer. The other day, my own granddaughter, flesh of flesh of my own loins, asked me 'Granddaddy, is it true cigarettes are *bad* for you?'
(back to Nick)
We got to do something, Nick. I think you're our man.

NICK
Thank you.

CAPTAIN

I want you to work on this Hollywood project. Get out there within the next couple weeks, stir something up.

NICK

(hesitant)

Sir, about the fifty million dollars...

CAPTAIN

Oh, in anti-teen smoking advertising?

(chuckles)

Well, shit, I sure hope it's not too persuasive.

EXT. WINSTON-SALEM AIRPORT - DAY

The Captain's Limo pulls into a private gate and stops in front of a Gulfstream 5.

Nick gets out of the Limo.

CAPTAIN

Nick, you're family now. Tobacco takes care of its own.

And with that, the Captain slips back into his Limo.

INT. GULFSTREAM 5 - SAME

Nick climbs aboard and is shocked by the lavish interior. He melts down into a seat of creamy brown leather. A *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue-quality STEWARDESS approaches Nick from the back of the cabin, then bends down to him, giving Nick an unavoidable peek into the world that lives beyond her top button.

STEWARDESS

If there's anything I can do to make your flight more pleasant, you be sure to let me know, now.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - FOLLOWING MORNING

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick takes a seat at his desk as GIZELLE, his assistant, follows with his "While You Were Outs".

GIZELLE

(handing over messages)
You've got a lot of new fans.

Nick begins to go through the MESSAGES.

NICK

(reading a couple)
I'm going to pour hot tar down your throat, you scumbag... I own a high-powered rifle and could drop a sack of shit like you at 250 yards.

(to Gizelle)
Jesus, you wrote death threats down on message slips?

GIZELLE

Everyone from *Newsweek* to *Teen People* want to talk to you. Heather Holloway from the Post left five messages. Oh, and BR wants to see you.

INT. BR'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

As Nick enters, BR welcomes him with a grunt.

BR

Pleasant flight?

NICK

Oh, yeah, you could say that. I came up on the Captain's plane. Quite the way to travel.

BR

I wouldn't know.

NICK

(digging it in)
Oh, you've never been on the plane, with those seats, and the kitchen, and that stewardess. Tiffany.

BR

I haven't had the chance yet.

NICK

(deeper)

Oh, well, you really must try it
sometime. It's the only way to travel.

BR is quick to stop this.

BR

What did he think of the fifty million
dollar anti-smoking campaign?

NICK

Anti-teen smoking campaign. He gave me
the go ahead. Oh, and he loved your idea
to put cigarettes back into movies.

BR

(covering up)

That's your idea. He must have gotten
confused.

NICK

Either way, he was pretty blown away.

BR

Right, well, get a ticket to LA. I'll get
you a meeting with Jeff Megall.

NICK

(getting up)

Who?

BR

Hollywood super-agent. Runs the agency,
A-C-T. He has the ears of the
entertainment business.

INT. NICK'S BMW - DAY

Nick is on the cell phone with his ex-wife, JILL.

NICK

It's not a vacation. It's a learning
experience. California is one of the
fastest growing states. It has the
largest number of electoral votes in the
country. This could be an important trip
for Joey.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JILL'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jill is on the phone, while Joey does his homework at the kitchen table, pretending not to listen.

JILL

Don't smooth talk me. You're not going to take him sight-seeing. You'll probably bring him to some lung cancer symposium where a guy with an electronic voice box will tell him his father is the devil.

NICK

That's unfair.

JILL

Unfair? What about Virginia?

NICK

What about Virginia?

JILL

You took him to a cigarette factory.

NICK

It was a tobacco farm. Hardly the same thing.

JILL

This conversation is over.

Jill hangs up.

Nick closes the cell phone against his chest.

NICK

Fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

The MOD SQUAD is at their usual table.

POLLY

So, my day is ruined. *Dateline* is doing a segment on fetal alcohol syndrome next Thursday.

NICK

That's a tough one.

POLLY

We're going to get creamed. Do you have any ideas for me?

NICK

I don't know. Deformed kids are tough. I'm lucky. My product only makes them bald before it kills them.

BOBBY JAY

Maybe you could hug the kids.

POLLY

They're not going to let me *hug* the kids.

NICK

Who's doing the segment? Donaldson or Sawyer?

POLLY

Sawyer, probably.

BOBBY JAY

You're fucked.

POLLY

Why?

NICK

She's going to hug them.

BOBBY JAY

Look, if you see her going in for a hug, try to box her out and get one in first.

POLLY

God, I'm really not looking forward to this.

NICK

Do either of you know anything about this reporter from the *Post*, Heather Holloway?

BOBBY JAY

Oh yeah. Irish type, blond hair, big green eyes, great skin. Amazing tits.

POLLY

Tits? Why are tits relevant?

BOBBY JAY

Hmm, let's see. World class tits on a reporter interviewing a man with privileged information are relevant.

POLLY

How about it Nick? Are you a "tit" man?

BOBBY JAY

Don't answer that question. It's a trap.

NICK

It depends, whose tits?

Polly smiles. Nick smiles back.

BOBBY JAY

Okay, yeah, just don't get screwed.

NICK

Bobby, I think I can handle a good-looking girl reporter.

CUT TO:

INT. IL PECCATORE RESTAURANT - EARLY EVENING

One word: Burgundy.

Nick walks right past the reservation desk. When he reaches his regular booth, it is already occupied by HEATHER HOLLOWAY. She stands to greet Nick. Heather is everything you thought she'd be... in a great skirt.

HEATHER

Heather Holloway, Washington Post.

NICK

Nick Naylor, Big Tobacco.

Heather places a tape recorder on the table as she sits.

HEATHER

(re: tape recorder)
Is this kosher?

NICK

Only if I can call you Heather.

HEATHER

By all means. So, Mr. Naylor...

NICK

Nick...

HEATHER

(all business)

Nick, let's start with...

NICK

An '88 Margaux?

HEATHER

(laughing)

Okay... is it good?

NICK

Good?

(pause for effect)

It will make you believe in God.

Heather smiles. It's going to be that type of interview.

JUMP CUT TO:

LATER

The wine is almost all gone and the plates are half empty.

NICK

So what is the focus of your piece?

HEATHER

You.

NICK

You want to know how I live with myself?

HEATHER

(smiling)

No, I don't imagine that's a problem. I want to know how you see yourself.

NICK

I'm a mediator between two sects of society that are trying to reach an accommodation.

HEATHER

Interesting. My other interviews have pinned you as a mass murderer, profiteer, pimp, bloodsucker, child killer, and my personal favorite, Yuppie Mephistopheles.

NICK

Sounds like a balanced article.

HEATHER

Who else should I talk to?

NICK

Fifty-five million American smokers, for starters or perhaps the American tobacco farmer who is constantly being treated like a drug smuggler.

HEATHER

I actually plan on speaking to a tobacco farmer.

NICK

Fine people. Salt of the earth.

HEATHER

Nick. Why do you do this? What motivates you?

NICK

You really want to know?

Heather leans in with intrigue. Nick turns off her recorder.

NICK (CONT'D)

Population control.

Heather laughs.

HEATHER

You're bad.

Their eyes meet for a charged beat. Nick relents.

NICK

Hey, everyone's got a mortgage to pay.

Nick takes a sip of his wine.

NICK (V.O.)

The Yuppie Nuremberg Defense.

Puts down the wine.

NICK (CONT'D)

I just also happen to have an ex-wife and a son in private school.

Heather turns the recorder on.

HEATHER

What does your son think of your job?

NICK

I'm sure when he gets past the
overwhelming gratitude he has for his
subsidized life,

(they share a laugh)

I'm sure he is proud of me.

HEATHER

And if you caught him smoking?

NICK

I would do everything in my power to stop
him.

HEATHER

Really?

NICK

He's a minor. It's against the law.

HEATHER

Is a mortgage really much of a life goal?

NICK

Ninety-nine percent of everything that is
done in the world, good or bad is done to
pay a mortgage. Perhaps the world would
be a better place if everyone rented.

HEATHER

Why don't you rent?

NICK

Oh, I rent as well.

HEATHER

Really?

NICK

My son, his mother, and her boyfriend
live in my house. I live in my apartment.

HEATHER

And what does Nick Naylor's apartment
look like?

NICK

Nothing impressive. It wouldn't make the real estate section.

HEATHER

Can I see it?

NICK

You want to see my apartment?

HEATHER

I want to see where the devil sleeps.

Heather gives a smile that stops Nick dead in his tracks. If we held one more moment, we'd see him say "check please", but instead we...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NICK NAYLOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Wide static shot of the whole room. Somewhere in frame, in bed, Nick and Heather are doing what could only be described as... fucking.

However, the sound is faint. Subtle headboard knocking, light moan and grunt, with just a dash of mattress squeak. Don't get me wrong, the sex is passionate. We're just uninvolved.

NICK (V.O.)

I have to admit, women find my job... really sexy.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NICK NAYLOR'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Similar shot of the kitchen. Static and quiet. At the end of the island, Nick is fucking Heather against the counter. One of her legs is up on the stove while she grabs the suspended pan rack for balance.

NICK (V.O.)

It's kind of this bad boy in a suit thing that gets women hot, or so I'm told.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NICK NAYLOR'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Similar shot of the living room. Serene. Almost boring. Nick is fucking Heather against a large window, looking over the Washington DC skyline.

NICK (V.O.)

I'm sure she finds me charming, but somewhere in the back of her head she's thinking - half a million people a year. Dangerous.

INT. KITCHEN - JILL NAYLOR RESIDENCE - NEXT MORNING

Jill and Joey eat scrambled eggs with orange juice. After a beat, Joey looks to his mom.

JOEY

Mom, why can't I go to California?

JILL

California is just not a safe place, and besides, I'm not sure if it's appropriate for your father to bring you on a business trip.

JOEY

Appropriate for who?

JILL

What?

JOEY

Mom, is it possible that you are taking the frustration of your failed marriage out on me?

Jill raises an eyebrow.

JOEY

I just don't want to become a pawn in your's and dad's separation. A situation that is tearing up fifty percent of American families and depriving millions of children of their right to grow up and explore their world.

Jill drops her fork.

JOEY

This California trip seems like a great learning opportunity and a chance for me to get to know my father. But if you think it's more important to use me to channel your own frustration against the man you no longer love, then I'll understand.

Joey goes back to his eggs.

CUT TO:

EXT. JILL NAYLOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Joey gets into a DC CAB beside his father.

NICK

How did you convince her?

JOEY

It was an argument, not a negotiation.

JOEY MUSIC BEGINS.

INT. DC CAB - DAY

Nick and Joey ride to the airport.

EXT. WASHINGTON MEMORIAL - DAY

The DC Cab drives by.

INT. TERMINAL - DULLES AIRPORT - DAY

Nick and Joey walk towards their gate.

INT. FIRST CLASS - BOEING 767 - DAY

Nick and Joey play cards.

INT. FIRST CLASS - BOEING 767 - LATER

Nick does work in his laptop while Joey does homework.

INT. FIRST CLASS - BOEING 767 - LATER

The plane lands. The passengers applaud. Nick smiles at Joey who has magic in his eyes.

INT. BAGGAGE CLAIM, LAX - DAY

Nick and Joey descend an escalator. The first thing they see is a young tanned man in a suit and shades holding a SIGN that reads "NICK NAYLOR". This is JACK.

NICK
(re: sign)
That's me.

JACK
Nick! Jack Bein, I'm Jeff's assistant.
How was your flight? Who's with you? You
ever been to LA?

NICK
Great, Jack, this is my son Joey. We were
going to rent a car.

JACK
You can if you want, but I came here to
pick you up. You can do either. Whatever
you want. It's up to you.

Wow. High blood sugar level.

INT. JACK'S BMW 300 SERIES - DAY

Jack drives up Sepulveda. Nick and Joey ride in the back seat, taking in the sun.

JACK
How you feeling, Nick? Jet-lagged? It's
two in DC. Try some Vitamin B, Jeff
swears by it. You want an injection?

NICK
No thanks.

Nick and Joey share a look.

JACK
How is it, living in DC. Is it all right?
The new guy, is he going to make it?

NICK
You mean, the President?

JACK
Yeah, him. Frankly, Jeff is a little
disappointed. Jeff went all out for him.
(MORE)

JACK(CONT'D)

Introduced him to the right people. Jeff is the one who introduced him to Barbra. Other people take credit for it, but it was Jeff who made it happen. I shouldn't be telling you that, but I like you, so I'm telling you.

INT. UNDERGROUND VALET - ACT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The three wait for an elevator. Jack points out a SCULPTURE.

JACK

It's a Noguchi. It was an office-warming present from Matthew McConaughey.

NICK

Generous gift.

JACK

(laughing)

Yeah, right.

(suddenly serious)

Don't get me wrong. Matthew is a tremendously talented individual and an extremely decent human being. However, before Jeff took him on, he was a face. Now he's a name.

"Ding". The elevator arrives, as if on cue.

INT. ATRIUM - ACT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Jack walks Nick and Joey past a KOI POND.

JACK

(whispering)

That one over there, seven thousand dollars.

NICK

Seven thousand, for a fish?

JACK

Go figure. Almost makes you want to stop eating sushi, but I guess you kind of have to.

(pointing to another fish)

That one's twelve thousand. A gift from Ashley Judd.

JOEY

Do you have any sharks?

JACK
No, we're very nice here.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION AREA - ACT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Jack leads Nick and Joey towards the MAJOR DOORS of Jeff's office.

JACK
Joey, I'm going to bring your dad in now.
Can I get you anything while you're
waiting? Orange Juice? Coffee? Red Bull?

INT. JEFF'S OFFICE - ACT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Simple. Post modern. The desk is completely clean.

NICK (V.O.)
There is perhaps nothing more powerful
and frightening in the corporate world
than a clean desk. I'm talking nothing.
No papers, no pens... The man doesn't
operate his stapler. He is pure mind
power.

The giant doors close behind Nick and JEFF emerges like a magic trick. He is fit, tanned, and dressed head-to-toe in Italian.

JEFF
Nick Naylor, Jeff Megall.

NICK
Great office.

JACK
You know, Jeff basically designed the
whole thing. The architect just made the
drawings.

JEFF
Stop it Jack. Next you're going to tell
Nick what position I played for the
Bruins.

(to the point)
Mr. Naylor is here to find a way to get
cigarettes into the hands of someone
other than the usual RAV's.

NICK

RAV's?

JEFF

Russians, Arabs, and Villains.

NICK

Oh, well, then I guess yes. That is why I'm here.

JEFF

Good. I think we can help you.

JACK

Jeff invented product placement.

NICK

I feel I have to ask, are you concerned at all with the health element?

JEFF

I don't have the answers on that. I'm not a doctor. I'm just a facilitator. All I do is bring creative people together. What information there is, is out there. People will decide for themselves. I can't make that decision for them. It's not my role. It would be morally presumptuous.

Nick is stunned.

NICK (V.O.)

I could learn a lot from this man.

They sit.

NICK

What we need is a smoking role model. A real winner.

JEFF

Indiana Jones meets Jerry Maguire...

NICK

... on two packs a day.

JEFF

But he can't live in contemporary society.

NICK

Why not?

JEFF

Health issue is too prevalent. People will constantly ask why the character is smoking, when it should go unsaid. What do you think about the future?

NICK

The future?

JEFF

Yes. After the health thing has blown over. A world where smokers and non-smokers live in perfect harmony. Sony has a futuristic sci-fi picture coming up. "*Message from Sector Six*". It all takes place on a space station. They're looking hard for any type of investor.

NICK

Cigarettes in space?

JEFF

The final frontier, Nick.

NICK

Wouldn't they blow up in an all oxygen environment.

JEFF

Easy fix. One line of dialogue.

(pitches)

Brad Pitt and Catherine Zeta-Jones have just finished ravishing each others bodies for the first time. They lay naked, suspended mid air, under the heavens. Pitt lights up and begins blowing smokes rings around every part of Catherine's flawless naked body as galaxies go whizzing by above the glass dome ceiling. Tell me that doesn't work for you?

NICK

I'd see that movie.

JEFF

I'd buy the god damned DVD... y'know if I didn't get the free one from the academy.

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

(serious again)
If I were you guys, I'd start on a new brand of cigarettes that could be released simultaneously to the film.

NICK
Sector Sixes.

JEFF
No one's done that with a cigarette.

NICK
Where do we go from here?

Jeff gets up and begins walking Nick to the door.

JEFF
You go enjoy the rest of your day with your son in Los Angeles, while I find answers for our questions.

EXT. L'ERMITAGE HOTEL - DAY

A BELLMAN approaches Jack's BMW and opens both car doors for Nick and Joey.

JACK
(from driver's seat)
Yo, Nick. Great job today. You need anything, just call me. I know how lonely a strange city can be...

NICK
(shutting door)
Thank you Jack.

BELLMAN
Welcome to L'Ermitage, Mr. Naylor. Your suite is ready.

NICK
Where can we grab a bite? Something, really, Los Angeles?

BELLMAN
Well, there's Spago, Mortons, Matsuhisa...

NICK
No, no, no. Where do the people go?

EXT. HENRY'S TACO STAND - DAY

The corner set taco stand in Los Angeles. To not know it is to not have lived.

Nick and Joey grabs their BURRITOS and COKES and have a seat.

JOEY

You go to an office. Then you go on TV and talk about cigarettes. Then you fly out to LA to talk to some guy who works with movie stars. What is that?

NICK

It's my job. I'm a lobbyist.

JOEY

I know, but did you study to do that?

NICK

No, I just kind of figured it out.

JOEY

Then, can't anyone just do that?

NICK

No, I think it requires a moral flexibility that kind of goes beyond most people.

JOEY

Do I have flexible morals?

NICK

Well, lets say you became a lawyer, right? And, you were asked to defend a murderer. Worse than that, a child murderer. The law states that every person deserves a fair trial. Would you defend him?

JOEY

I don't know. I guess every person deserves a fair defense.

NICK

Yeah, well... So do multi-national corporations.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - DUSK

A mix of LA youth and family sift each way down the pier as Nick and Joey lean on the rail, lost in conversation.

JOEY

So, what happens when you're wrong?

NICK

No, Joey. I'm never wrong.

JOEY

You can't always be right... Right?

NICK

If it's your job to be right. Then, you're never wrong.

JOEY

(still confused)

But, what if you are wrong?

NICK

Okay, lets say you're defending chocolate and I'm defending vanilla. Now, if I were to say to you, *vanilla is the best flavor of ice cream*, you'd say...

JOEY

No, chocolate is.

NICK

Exactly. But you can't win that argument. So, I'll ask you: So you think chocolate is the end all and be all of ice cream, do you?

JOEY

(pushing adamance)

It's the best ice cream. I wouldn't order any other.

NICK

Oh, so it's all chocolate for you, is it?

JOEY

Yes, chocolate is all I need.

NICK

Well, I need more than chocolate. And for that matter, I need more than vanilla.

(MORE)

NICK(CONT'D)

I believe we need freedom and choice when it comes to our ice cream and that, Joey Naylor. That is the definition of liberty.

JOEY

But that's not what we're talking about.

NICK

That's what I'm talking about.

JOEY

But you didn't prove that vanilla was the best.

NICK

I didn't have to. I proved that you're wrong. And if you're wrong, I'm right.

JOEY

But you still didn't convince me.

NICK

I'm not after you.
(pointing to the crowded pier)
I'm after them.

Joey is beginning to understand.

CUT TO:

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - NIGHT

Nick and Joey ride to the crest of the Ferris Wheel, overlooking Santa Monica. They both are enjoying cones of VANILLA ICE CREAM.

FADE TO:

INT. NICK'S ROOM, L'ERMITAGE HOTEL - LATER THAT EVENING

Nick pats Joey on the head, then sends him off to sleep and closes the separation door between their two rooms.

The telephone rings... Nick answers...

NICK

(checking his watch)
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH: INT. JEFF MEGALL'S OFFICE - SAME

Jeff sits at his desk, now wearing a KIMONO. The city lights twinkle behind him.

JEFF

Thought I'd give you a little update.

NICK

Oh, hi Jeff. You're still at the office?

JEFF

Do you know what time it is in Tokyo right now?

NICK

No.

JEFF

Four PM, tomorrow. It's the future, Nick.

Nick simply mouths the words, "*fuck me*".

JEFF

Anyhow, for Brad Pitt to smoke it's ten million. For the pair, it's twenty five.

NICK

Twenty five? Usually when I buy two of something, I get a discount. What's the extra five for?

JEFF

Synergy. These are not dumb people. They got it right away. Pitt and Zeta-Jones lighting up after some cosmic fucking in the bubble suite is going to sell a lot of cigarettes.

NICK

For this kind of money, my people will expect some very serious smoking. Can Brad Pitt blow smoke rings?

JEFF

I don't have that information.

NICK

Well, for twenty five million, we'd want smoke rings.

JEFF

Oh, there's one more thing. You'd be co-financing this picture with the Sultan of Glutan. Is that going to be all right?

NICK

The Sultan of Glutan? The one who massacred and enslaved his own people? Aren't they calling him the "Hitler of the South Pacific"?

JEFF

I can't speak to that. I can say that in all my dealings with him, he's been a very reasonable and sensitive individual.

NICK

I better run it by my people.

Jeff reads a message on his AMTEL.

JEFF

Of course... Gotta run Nick. London's calling. Eight AM in the old empire.

NICK

(dumbfounded)

Jeff, when do you sleep?

JEFF

Sunday.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NICK'S HOTEL ROOM - L'ERMITAGE HOTEL - MORNING

Nick turns over in his bed to realize that his message light is on. He picks up the receiver and dials the front desk.

NICK

Yeah, my light is blinking...

(listens)

Oh, okay, send it up.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S HOTEL ROOM - L'ERMITAGE HOTEL - MORNING

Nick is sitting on the bed with an open BRIEFCASE before him. His expression really makes us want to know what's inside.

Nick is on the PHONE with the Captain.

NICK

Captain, I'm sitting in front of an open
briefcase...

We pull around the OPEN BRIEFCASE. Inside are stacks of
hundred dollar bills, drug-dealer style.

NICK

I don't suppose this is my raise.

Nick picks up a CASH BUNDLE, examining it.

CAPTAIN

Nick, you know who Lorne Lutch is?

NICK

Of course. He was the original Marlboro
Man. He's dying. He was on Sally last
week. Not exactly our biggest fan.

CAPTAIN

The money is for him. He has a ranch out
there in California. I want you to bring
it to him.

NICK

He's a cowboy sir. Cowboys don't like
bribes.

CAPTAIN

It's not a bribe. You're going out there
on wings of angels, son.

NICK

You mean we're just giving him the money?

CAPTAIN

I think Christ himself would say, 'That's
mighty white of you, boys.'

NICK

No gag agreement?

CAPTAIN

Hopefully, he'll be so damn overcome with
gratitude, he'll have to shut up.

INT. JOEY'S ROOM - DAY

Joey is jumping on the bed.

Nick enters the room, dragging his feet.

NICK

Hey, kiddo. Look, I've got to go and do a little more work this afternoon.

JOEY

I want to come.

Nick looks into his son's eyes.

JOEY

I want to see.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Nick's rented CHRYSLER SEBRING kicks up dust as it cuts by various ranches.

INT. CHRYSLER SEBRING - DAY

Nick looks over to the passenger seat, where his son stares out the window, excited. Then Nick turns to the backseat, where the briefcase sits like an anchor.

EXT. LORNE LUTCH'S RANCH - DAY

Southern style. Broken down. Oxygen tanks on the porch.

Nick pulls up in the front yard. He gets out of the car, pulls out the briefcase, and steps forward.

Nick stares at the house, thinking of what condition Lorne Lutch will be in. He takes in a deep breath and starts towards the porch. A few steps later, the screen door swings open, and out of the darkness comes the "chu-chink" of a shotgun.

Nick freezes again.

LORNE LUTCH

(in shadows)

You're Nick Naylor, aren't you?

NICK

Do you... could I... do you have a minute?

Lorne emerges from the shadows, shotgun over his shoulder. He's broad and weathered. A cowboy with lung cancer.

LORNE LUTCH
What do you want here?

The Sebring's passenger door flies open and Joey runs out.

JOEY
Dad...

NICK
Joey, get back in the car.

Joey freezes. Nick raises his arms.

NICK
I just want to talk.

A fly buzzes around Nick. Lorne stares him down, then looks over at Joey who is hyperventilating.

LORNE LUTCH
All right. Come in.

Lorne turns back inside, holding the door open with the muzzle of his shotgun.

Nick lowers his arms and walks up to the house. Joey stays a moment, then follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LORNE LUTCH'S RANCH HOUSE- DAY

Hot and dusty. Perhaps, a Deer Head. Photos of Lorne with celebrities and politicians that cease circa 1970.

Lorne returns the shotgun to its rack.

LORNE LUTCH
Pearl, we've got company.

PEARL, Lorne's wife, nurse, and reason to be alive enters the room from a hallway and freezes at the sight of Nick.

PEARL
Mister, you've got a lot'a'nerve...

LORNE LUTCH
(gesturing to Joey)
Pearl. Show this young man some Ice Tea?

Joey's mind is in hyperdrive, trying to keep up with the information: *Who is my father?*

Pearl pats Joey on the back and leads him into the kitchen. However, Joey finds a seat where he can still view the action in the living room.

Nick takes a seat on the couch, while Lorne eases into his rocking chair.

LORNE LUTCH

Saw you on... weren't you on that Oprah show?

NICK

Yeah.

LORNE LUTCH

You're lucky you made it out of there alive.

NICK

Tobacco used to be all over television. Now, TV is leading the witch hunt.

LORNE LUTCH

Strange business. In the early fifties, they had the first cancer scare, so they brought in those filters. Then they got worried that men would think filters were for pussies. That's where I came in.

NICK

You were great. I used to want to be you. I mean, when I was growing up. We all did.

LORNE LUTCH

Last year, after I got diagnosed, I flew east to attend the annual stockholders' meeting. I stood up and told them that they ought to limit their advertising. And do you know what your boss said to me?

Nick knows, but doesn't interrupt.

LORNE LUTCH

He said 'We're certainly sorry to hear about your medical problem.

(MORE)

LORNE LUTCH(CONT'D)

However, without knowing your medical history, we can't comment further.' Then they tried to pretend I never worked for them. I mean I've got pay stubs, but hell I'm on the damn billboards.

(breaks for breath)

I never even smoked Marlboro. I smoked Kools.

The two men chuckle over this.

INT. KITCHEN - LORNE LUTCH'S RANCH HOUSE - SAME

Pearl gives Joey an Ice Tea.

PEARL

Your dad always bring you along like this?

JOEY

No, I live with my mom.

PEARL

Did he tell you why he's here today?

JOEY

He said, your husband is the Marlboro Man.

PEARL

Not anymore.

The PHONE rings. Pearl gets up and turns on the TV. Cartoons.

PEARL

You want any more, just grab it from the fridge.

Pearl exits through the back of the kitchen.

As soon as she's gone, Joey scoots up to the doorway overlooking the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LORNE LUTCH'S RANCH HOUSE - SAME

LORNE LUTCH

You look like a nice enough fellah. What are you doing working for these assholes?

Hold on Nick as he chooses his words carefully.

NICK

I'm good at it. I'm better at doing this than I ever was at doing anything else.

LORNE LUTCH

Well hell, son, I was good at shooting Koreans, but I didn't make it my career.

There is a pause as Lorne studies Nick.

LORNE LUTCH

I suppose we all got to pay the mortgage somehow.

Nick exhales.

LORNE LUTCH

So, you here to talk me into shutting up? Is that what's in that case of yours?

Joey stares, trying to keep up with the action.

NICK

Yeah, basically...
(picking up the briefcase)
No, not basically. That's exactly it.

LORNE LUTCH

My dignity ain't for sale.

NICK

This isn't an offer. It's a gift. The taxes have all been paid. You get to keep it no matter what you do. The idea is that your guilt will prevent you from bad-mouthing us.

LORNE LUTCH

Were you supposed to tell me all that?

NICK

No. Just apologize, give you the money, and leave.

LORNE LUTCH

Then why are you telling me this?

A moment. Joey gets closer. Then...

Nick ignites. He looks up at Lorne.

NICK

Because this way, you'll take the money.

LORNE LUTCH

Why would I do that?

NICK

Because you're mad. The first thing you'll do is call the LA Times and CNN.

LORNE LUTCH

Damn straight.

NICK

And insist on Bonnie Dalton. She does really good controlled outrage. Tell them no Bonnie, no story, watch it on MSNBC.

LORNE LUTCH

(trying to keep up)
Okay...

NICK

When they get here, open up the case and dump all the cash out onto the floor.

LORNE LUTCH

Why?

Nick is really cooking now. He gets up...

NICK

It'll look more effective. Here, look...

Nick opens the briefcase and begins to dump the MONEY onto the floor... it's a lot of money.

Joey's eyes widen.

NICK

(shaking the case)
Don't forget to shake every last bundle out. And if you can, you know, give a cough or two.

Nick dumps the briefcase.

NICK

Once it's all out, you tell them what you're going to do with it.

LORNE LUTCH
 (now standing)
 What am I going to do with it?

NICK
 Donate it. Start the Lorne Lutch Cancer
 Foundation. You'll have a ranch and a
 fair and a 5K...
 (aside to Lorne)
 The 5K is a must.
 (back to pitch)
 The TV coverage will be great...

LORNE LUTCH
 Wait, what about my family?

NICK
 Whoa, Lorne, you can't keep the money.

LORNE LUTCH
 (caught in the enthusiasm)
 Why the hell not?

NICK
 What, denounce us and then keep the blood
 money? Look at it.

Lorne looks at the pile of money. One million dollars is a
 lot of money.

LORNE LUTCH
 I've got to think it over.

NICK
 You can't denounce us next week. News
 doesn't work that way Lorne.

LORNE LUTCH
 I don't suppose I can denounce you for
 half of it.

NICK
 No Lorne. You either keep all the money
 or give it all away.

Lorne looks to Nick for support. Nick has now turned off.
 Lorne looks back down at the money.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRYSLER SEBRING - DAY

Nick drives. Joey looks to his father with pride. The briefcase is nowhere in sight.

JOEY

Dad, how did you know he was going to take the money?

Nick shoots a look at Joey, ready to question how he saw Lorne and the briefcase, but relents - *He saw.*

NICK

You'd have to be crazy to turn down all that money. As soon as I saw he wasn't crazy, I knew he'd take it.

JOEY

Would you have taken it?

NICK

If I were him?
(thinks for a second)
Sure.

Joey thinks for a second.

JOEY

So would I.

Nick pats his son's head while Joey enjoys the warm glow of his father's affection.

We stick on a close-up of Nick with a proud father smile, as we begin to hear...

RON GOODE (O.C.)

He's an animal, sir. You can't take your guard down for a second.

CUT TO:

INT. LARRY KING LIVE SET - DAY

RON is walking his boss, Senator FINISTIRRE to the set.

FINISTIRRE

(pulling off make-up bib)
Ron, shut up...

Without stopping, Finistirre sits down in the interview seat.

FINISTIRRE

(to Larry)

Hi Larry...

(back to Ron)

I've tangoed with presidents, Arabs, and Indian chiefs. I think I can handle Mr. Nick Naylor.

CUT TO:

LARRY KING LIVE

Sitting across from Larry and his giant mic is Finistirre.

LARRY KING

We have two guests with us tonight. Here in the studio in Washington we have Democratic Senator Finistirre from Vermont. Thank you for joining us again, Senator.

FINISTIRRE

Always a pleasure, Larry.

Nick's image pops up on a screen, next to them.

LARRY

And live in our LA studio is Nick Naylor, chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies. Good evening, Nick.

NICK

Good evening, Larry.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. LA STUDIO - DAY

Nick is in the hot seat, with a monitor to watch Larry and Finistirre.

Behind the camera and the crew, stands JOEY, watching his dad with pride.

LARRY

Now Nick, you created quite a fuss on the Oprah Show, didn't you?

NICK

I'll say this. I don't think I will be getting my annual invitation to the Finistirre Labor Day Barbecue.

FINISTIRRE

(defensive)

Uh, Larry, as you probably know, I don't believe in the annual barbecuing of livestock which only adds to the animal cruelty problem that permeates the heartland.

LARRY KING

Well, Senator, it doesn't sound like you'll be having Nick over anytime soon for anything.

FINISTIRRE

I continue to offer an open invitation to Mr. Naylor to join us in Congress to discuss the inclusion of our new poison label, which if I may say...

LARRY KING

How 'bout it Nick? Will you be making an appearance in Congress.

NICK

Not as long as the Senator is calling for me to be fired. It's not exactly a welcome invitation.

LARRY KING

It could be considered a mixed message, Senator.

FINISTIRRE

Not as mixed as Big Tobacco's stance on the dangers of smoking cigarettes.

Nick begins to laugh. This takes both Larry & Finistirre off guard.

LARRY KING

Nick, now you're laughing? The Senator does have a point, doesn't he?

NICK

I can't help myself. I'm tickled by the idea of the gentleman from Vermont calling me a hypocrite. This from a man, who in one day, held a press conference where he called for the American tobacco fields to be slashed and burned. Then, jumped on a private jet. Flew down to Peru for the Eco Summit and denounced the Meed corporation for deforestation. I'm sorry, I find that funny.

Joey's smile says: *My dad is one bad ass motherfucker.*

LARRY KING

Would you like to respond, Mr. Senator?

Finistirre thinks about this. He's really holding back.

FINISTIRRE

(straining)

Um. No.

LARRY KING

Emotional issue.

(switches gears)

Lets take some calls. Herndon, Virginia, you're on the air.

CALLER

Larry, has anyone ever announced that they're going to kill someone live on your show?

LARRY

No, but we get a lot of angry calls.

CALLER

Then it's your lucky day, because I'm here to tell you that within a week, we're going to dispatch Mr. Naylor from this planet, for all the pain and suffering he's caused the world.

The phone clicks. An awkward pause. Nick is stunned.

Joey is suddenly very scared.

An uncomfortable pause. Then...

LARRY
Emotional issue.

CUT TO:

INT. SECURITY, LAX - DAY

Nick has his arms out, shoes in hand, as he is given the full court press by the security.

NICK (V.O.)
For once, I enjoy the overzealous security.

INT. BOEING 767 - DAY

Nick walks back from the bathroom to his seat. On his way, he observes each passenger, trying to discern the amount of fear in their eyes.

NICK (V.O.)
Most people don't want to die. Cigarette smokers included. It's funny how many times a day people say things like, "I ought-a KILL him" or "Don't make me KILL you." Only with me, they are usually being serious.

Nick takes his seat next to Joey in the BULKHEAD. Joey has his feet on the color striped wall before him.

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT stops at their row.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
(to Joey)
I'm sorry, young man, but you can't keep your feet on there.

JOEY
If you don't want people putting their feet up, why do you cover the wall in carpet?

The flight attendant has to hand it to him. Good point. She winks and doesn't say another word. Nick smiles at his son.

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - DAY

Nick pushes a LUGGAGE CART. Joey walks next to him, one hand on the cart.

Nick looks around at the even flow of people, trying to evaluate each person as they pass. You can't be too careful.

EXT. JILL NAYLOR'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Nick is parked out front in the BMW.

Joey runs by his mom into the house. Jill meanwhile stares at Nick and shakes her head. She evidently saw Larry King.

EXT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Nick rounds the corner and is about to pull into his garage, when he notices a HOARD OF PRESS waiting for him at his front door. Cameras, lights, the whole bit.

Nick immediately speeds past his building and rounds the corner.

INT. UNKNOWN APARTMENT - EVENING

The FRONT DOOR swings open revealing Nick. A woman's hand comes into frame and strokes his face. She then comes into frame herself and embraces him, revealing her to be HEATHER.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nick and Heather fuck. Meanwhile, on the TV behind them a NEWS ANCHOR speaks on mute. The image in the upper left hand corner of the screen is NICK from Larry King. The caption reads LOBBYIST ON THE LOOKOUT.

Heather sees Nick on TV and suddenly stops.

HEATHER

Oh my god, you're on TV!

NICK

You were watching TV?

Heather whips Nick around.

HEATHER

I wanna fuck you while I watch you on TV.

NICK

And they call me sick.

HEATHER

Hurry, I don't want to miss your clip...

Nick and Heather shift so she can see the TV.

Heather giggles.

NICK

This is new.

HEATHER

Tell me more about Los Angeles.

Nick looks up at Heather, then she does something with her hips that makes Nick smile as his eyes go to half mast.

FADE TO:

INT. JOEY'S CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

It's speech day. A FLIGHTY GIRL who, one day, will never graduate Vidal Sassoon's hair academy no matter how hard she tries is making her finishing remarks.

FLIGHTY GIRL

... and freedom means that we can do what we want and that's really important because otherwise we couldn't be free and that's why America is the best government in the world.

Joey's TEACHER wakes the class up with a heavy cupped-hand applause. The rest of the class follows suit, half awake.

TEACHER

Okay, Joey, you're up.

Joey stays seated for a moment and takes in a deep breath like his father usually does.

He gets up and swaggers to the front of the room, taking each step with confidence, swallowing the entire room. Joey then spins and faces the class.

JOEY

What makes America the best government? A passion that doesn't exist anywhere else in the world? Sure, you can call it capitalism. A free market. A celebration of tariff break downs. I have another word for it...

SLAM INTO JOEY

JOEY

Love.

FADE TO:

TV COMMERCIAL:

EXT. BLEACHERS - DAY

FATHER and SON, bad actors the both, are sitting in the bleachers, wearing baseball uniforms. They've just finished throwing around the ball. Dad pulls out a smoke.

SON

Dad, when do I get to smoke?

FATHER

When you're eighteen, son. If you tried smoking now, it may stunt your growth. Then you could never play in the major leagues.

Father laughs and pats his son's head.

SON

When I get older, I'm going to smoke your brand, so I can be just like you.

FATHER

Oh, son you make me so proud. And, believe you me, they're worth the wait.

LOGO AND VOICE OVER

NARRATOR

Everything your parents tell you about smoking is right.

We pull out of the TV, revealing BR and Nick, watching the spot in...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

An AD MAN steps forward and turns off the Monitor.

AD MAN

It's brilliance, if I may say so, is in its deconstructability.

NICK

How's that?

AD MAN

Say the last three words of the tag out loud.

NICK

... *Smoking is right.*

The ad man smiles.

BR

We're thinking of tying in some brand names.

AD MAN

'Dad, I want to smoke Marlboro Reds, just like you.'

NICK

The Captain will be pleased.

(switching gears)

What about these skull and crossbones they want us to put on the packs?

The AD MAN pulls out a DISPLAY CARD, hidden by a sheer cloth.

AD MAN

Okay, now this was a challenge. However, nothing in the verbiage of the bill specified that we couldn't make it our own skull and crossbones.

Nick and BR nod. Impressed by the logic.

AD MAN (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, let me introduce you to...

(whips back the cloth)

... *HAVE A NICE DEATH!*

The DISPLAY shows a SKULL AND CROSSBONES contorted into the happy face associated with "have a nice day" - It's horrifying.

BR

Is that what I think it is?

AD MAN

It scored just slightly higher than our second place design... *"Mr. Death's neighborhood."*

NICK

It's awful.

BR

Nick, we can't let that bill pass...

Nick is lost in the frightening visage of "Have a Nice Death."

BR

Nick!

(Nick looks over)

You know what you have to do...? Crush
the fucker.

Nick nods.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick is on the phone.

NICK

What is it Jill?

Intercut with:

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Jill is on the CELL PHONE, while Joey picks CEREAL in the
background.

JILL

Nick, I had to tell you. Joey gave a
speech in class today.

NICK

(thinks he's in trouble)
Yeah?

FLASH TO:

INT. JOEY'S CLASSROOM - EARLIER

Joey speaks with fervor, but we only hear Jill. We push down
the classroom of stunned and captivated students.

JILL (V.O.)

He moved Ms. Terhagen to tears.

We push into Joey's Teacher who is visibly crying in
appreciation.

BACK TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Jill remains at the end of the cereal aisle.

JILL

Nick, I don't know what you said to Joey in California, but thank you.

NICK

What? For teaching him how to speak?

JILL

No, for being his father.

Joey has stopped looking for cereal and has locked onto his mother's phone conversation.

NICK

I revel each chance I get.

JILL

I'm sorry I doubted you.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick puts down the phone. We recognize a different kind of pride in his eyes.

A man wearing a FLAK JACKET and "security" ball cap enters the room with a gun in his hand.

NICK

(checking)

You are the one doing the security briefing? Aren't you?

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

The MOD Squad at their regular table.

NICK

... I told him I don't need body guards. I'm a man of the people.

BOBBY JAY

Rock on, Kennedy.

POLLY

We're all going to need bodyguards soon enough.

(MORE)

POLLY(CONT'D)

Did you see the coverage the fetal-alcohol people got themselves over this weekend. They made it sound like we encourage pregnant mothers to drink. I'm surprised I didn't get kidnapped on the way to work this morning.

This catches Nick's attention.

NICK

(patronizing)

I don't think people who work for the alcoholic beverage industry have to worry about being kidnapped, just yet.

All movement stops. Polly stares Nick down.

POLLY

Pardon me?

NICK

Look, nothing personal, but tobacco generates a little more heat than alcohol.

POLLY

Oh, this is news.

NICK

My product puts away 475 thousand a year...

POLLY

(rhetorical)

Oh, now 475 is a legit number?

NICK

Okay, 435 thousand, that's twelve hundred a day. How many alcohol related deaths a year? A hundred thousand, tops? Two hundred seventy something a day? Well wow-wee. Two hundred and seventy people. Oh, the tragedy. Excuse me if I don't exactly see terrorists getting excited enough to kidnap anyone from the alcohol industry.

BOBBY JAY

Okay, let's breathe.

NICK

How many gun deaths a year in the US, Bobby Jay?

BOBBY JAY
Eleven thousand.

NICK
Eleven thousand? You've got to be kidding me? Thirty a day. That's less than passenger car mortalities. No terrorist would bother with either of you.

Nick goes back to his food. A long silence follows.

Nick realizes that he's shoved a little too hard.

NICK
Look, this is a stupid argument.

POLLY
I'll say.

NICK
I'm sure both of you warrant vigilante justice.

POLLY
Thank you.

BOBBY JAY
Not all of us can get our lives threatened on national television, you know.

POLLY
Within a week, we'll find out this is one big publicity stunt.

NICK
Yeah, or I'll be dead.

BOBBY JAY
(doesn't see the difference)
Either way...

Nick smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE STREET - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Nick walks away from Bert's. He goes to get in his BMW, when a VAN screeches to a halt beside him.

Nick looks up, but it's too late. The VAN DOOR slides open and he is yanked into the opening as the wheels peel out.

INT. KIDNAPPER'S MINI-VAN - DAY

Nick is immediately tackled to the ground by two hooded men. The two men BLINDFOLD Nick, then HANDCUFF him.

NICK
Wait... huh... let's talk!

The two men proceed to swiftly cut off Nick's clothes with RAZORS, leaving only his undershorts.

NICK
Wo, wo, wo!... Can we get a dialogue going here?

No answer.

Then, a voice breaks the silence. A friendly voice, actually. Saturday morning cartoon friendly. It could be Mr. Rogers.

KIDNAPPER
Hi Nick.

The kidnapper sits behind Nick's head. His face is hidden in shadows.

NICK
Can we talk about this? Usually, they let you know why they're kidnapping you. That's kind of the whole point.

KIDNAPPER
Nick, we want you to stop killing people. So many people. Half a million people a year in the U.S.

NICK
There's no data to support that.

KIDNAPPER
Nick... you're not on TV anymore.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREET - DAY

The Kidnapper's MINI-VAN flies by.

INT. KIDNAPPER'S MINI-VAN - DAY

The two men in hoods pull out cardboard BOXES. From the boxes they pull little PACKAGES. One man opens a package, pulls out something white, then SLAPS it down on Nick's CHEST, where it sticks like a band-aid. Then the other man does the same. The two men start covering Nick's entire body with these little white stickers...

SLAP!... SLAP!... SLAP!, SLAP!... SLAP!

KIDNAPPER

Nick, how much do you smoke a day?

NICK

What are you doing?

KIDNAPPER

According to the box, each one of those patches contains twenty-one milligrams of nicotine. That's like what? One Pack?

SLAP!... SLAP!, SLAP!

NICK

Look, I think it's perfectly legitimate that nonsmokers feel they're entitled to breathe smoke-free air. Our industry has been working hand in hand...

KIDNAPPER

Nick, just listen, all right? Says here there are many adverse reactions from these things. Let's see, Erythema, which I think is just a rash, no big thing.

(reading)

Then you got back pain, constipation, dyspepsia, nausea, myalgia...

NICK

My industry does forty-eight billion a year in revenue.

SLAP!, SLAP!...SLAP!

KIDNAPPER

(continues reading)

Pharyngitis, Sinusitis,...

(struggles with word)

Dys-men-or-rhea. I don't even want to know what that means.

NICK

I would guess that you could start by asking for five million and work your way up from there.

SLAP!, SLAP!

KIDNAPPER

But I don't want any money, Nick.

NICK

Well, what do you want? I mean, I'm all ears, here.

SLAP!... SLAP!

KIDNAPPER

Nick... what does any man want? The love of a woman? Crisp bacon? An average life span over eighty years?

The slapping stops. Nick begins to hyperventilate.

KIDNAPPER

Nick, did you know in the next ten years, two hundred eighty million people will die from smoking. That's the entire population of the United States.

Nick is struggling for air and turning red.

KIDNAPPER

Oh, Nick. You don't look so good...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE REFLECTION POND - WASHINGTON MEMORIAL - AFTERNOON

Two US Park Policemen are looking over the pond, when Nick stumbles out from behind a tree, still naked and covered in nicotine patches. He falls into the reflection pool.

The two US Officers run up to Nick and begin to yank him out. As they do, we notice for the first time a sign around his neck:

*Executed for
Crimes Against Humanity*

NICK'S POV: The two Policemen stand over him.

BEAT COP 1
That's some pretty sick shit...

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - DAY - VIDEO FOOTAGE DREAM SEQUENCE

Bad Grainy Yellow Video - We're watching the HOTEL CHANNEL in which they instruct you how to escape during a fire.

Smoke fills the ceiling of the corridor.

Smoke curls under the door.

NARRATOR
(comforting female)
If you see or smell smoke,

Nick enters the bathroom. As it turns out, he is the subject of the video.

NARRATOR
*Take a wash cloth, soak it with water,
and cover your nose and mouth.*

Nick takes a wash cloth and follows the instructions.

Nick approaches the hotel room door.

NARRATOR
Before opening your door, check for heat.

Nick touches the door. He's satisfied. He opens the door and walks into the corridor. People run by. The Fire alarm begins to fade up from the background, getting louder and louder.

NARRATOR
*Do not remove your washcloth. Try at all
times to avoid breathing in the smoke...*

The smoke cloud lowers. The alarm gets louder.

NARRATOR
*If necessary, crawl on your hands and
knees to avoid smoke inhalation.*

Nick takes to all fours, still trying to keep the wash cloth on his face. The alarm gets even louder.

NARRATOR

If you do happen to inhale the smoke, do not be alarmed. There are still no conclusive studies that link the inhalation of smoke to emphysema.

Nick looks up confused dropping his wash cloth. He stands up in the smoke just as we...

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S RECOVERY ROOM - ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Nick opens his eyes. Next to him, a NURSE is fiddling with Nick's various monitors, whose beeps match the dream.

The nurse catches Nick out of the corner of her eye...

NURSE

You woke up.

NICK (V.O.)

Perhaps a bad choice of inflection? Is she inferring that I could have just as easily, not?

Without waiting a beat, the nurse grabs the BED REMOTE and presses the up button, lifting Nick into the seated position.

Waiting before him is a line of familiar people. As the Romper Room lady would say, *I see...*

BOBBY JAY, POLLY, JOEY, GIZELLE, BR, a DOCTOR, the NURSES, and right in the middle is a BIG SCREEN TV, on which is a live image of the CAPTAIN in his own hospital bed. They all just stare silently, then Joey runs up and hugs his dad.

JOEY

I was so scared.

Nick embraces his son. Then, the Captain breaks the silence.

CAPTAIN

(on TV)

How you feeling sport?

NICK

What happened?

The doctor breaks from the group, and takes to Nick's side.

DOCTOR

No non-smoker could ever have withstood the amount of nicotine you had in your bloodstream.

(flustered)

I hate to say it, but... cigarettes saved your life.

NICK

Can I quote you on that?

CAPTAIN

(on TV)

You're a real trooper, my boy.

NICK

Captain, where are you?

CAPTAIN

(on TV)

Winston-Salem General... Damned heart failed on me again. Thought we could be room mates.

DOCTOR

Uh, Nick, before we get side tracked, there is one thing.

NICK

Don't get dramatic on me, doc.

DOCTOR

You can't smoke.

NICK

No problem. I've quit before. I did during the pregnancy and the divorce. How long, you think?

DOCTOR

I don't think you understand. It's a miracle that you came out of this alive. Any smoking... one cigarette could put you back into a paralytic state. Your body just can't handle it.

Nick looks around the room. It is evident from everybody's expressions that they already knew this.

BR

Nick, I don't want to put any more pressure on you, but there's a camera crew standing by. If we want to make the evening news...

Nick looks around the room, then to his son.

CUT TO:

THE EVENING NEWS

Nick is being interviewed in bed. Joey sits by his side.

NICK

Well, this just goes to prove what I've been saying for a long time: These nicotine patches are just deadly. Smoking... saved my life.

INTERVIEWER

Considering your condition, will you still be able to appear before Senator Finistirre's sub-committee hearing on the usage of poison labels on cigarette packaging?

NICK

I think now more than ever, it is imperative that I be present. Nothing will keep me from testifying.

We pull out from the image, revealing we are in...

INT. SENATOR FINISTIRRE'S OFFICE - DAY

FINISTIRRE and RON Goode from the Oprah show watch in pain.

FINISTIRRE

Fucking kidnapping.

Ron turns off the TV.

RON

I don't understand, sir. Aren't we considering the kidnapping a good thing?

FINISTIRRE

Well, he didn't die.

RON
He almost died.

FINISTIRRE
That's the problem. Now he looks like a
victim. Lucky bastard.

RON
He was almost killed, sir.

FINISTIRRE
Yes.

A moment goes by. Ron doesn't have an answer.

FINISTIRRE
It's called sympathy. It means we can't
wipe the floor with him, because people
will think we're... bullies.

The INTERCOM crackles up.

SECRETARY
Senator Finistirre, Heather Holloway has
arrived for her interview.

FINISTIRRE
Okay, good.
(to Ron)
Leave.

Ron scurries out of the room, as the door opens revealing
Heather, looking outstanding as usual.

FINISTIRRE
Ms. Holloway.

HEATHER
Senator.

The office door closes as the two take their seats. Then...

Heather opens up her bag and pulls out a stack of papers. She
slides them across the desk.

Finistirre picks them up, revealing them to be... A FILM
SCRIPT. The title page says *Message from Sector Six*. He flips
the title page and finds a letter from JEFF MEGALL on agency
letterhead. The note has five sentences and a dollar amount.

FINISTIRRE

Nice.

INT. CAFETERIA - ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Joey joins the MOD squad in their similar eating positions. Only, now Bert's Restaurant has been replaced by the St. Joseph's Hospital Commissary.

BOBBY JAY

DC police found you naked, doing laps in the reflection pool, with a sign over your head that said...

POLLY

Stop it, he doesn't need the details.

BOBBY JAY

It was some pretty sick shit, I'll say that.

POLLY

How do you feel?

NICK

I don't know. For the first time, I'm thinking these cigarettes are pretty dangerous.

Polly smiles. Meanwhile, Bobby Jay reaches into his inner Vest pocket, pulls out a small PISTOL, and begins to hide it in Nick's wheel chair.

POLLY

What are you doing?

BOBBY JAY

I know it looks small, but it really does the trick. One shot, Bam.

POLLY

Nick is not shooting anybody.

JOEY

(re: gun)
Cool...

BOBBY JAY

(proud)
Yeah, huh...?

Nick and Polly frown.

BOBBY JAY (CONT'D)
 (suddenly restrained)
 ... I mean, guns must be treated with respect.

NICK
 (to Bobby Jay)
 You're going to make a great father.

Everyone is smiling at this, when two men in OVERCOATS appear out of nowhere.

OVERCOAT 1
 Hello, Mr. Naylor, we're...

BOBBY JAY
 (finishing)
 ... The FEDS. Nick, you don't have to talk to these guys.

Overcoat 1 lifts up his BADGE.

OVERCOAT 1
 We just have a few questions.

OVERCOAT 2
 Mr. Naylor, can you think of anyone who would have a reason to do this to you.

On Nick: You've got to be fucking kidding me.

CUT TO:

INT. ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - RECEPTION - DAY

The entire Spin Control team waits at the front door for Nick's arrival. Nick enters and they erupt like Times Square on V-Day.

BR steps forward and raises Nick's arm into the air. They cheer again.

TRAINEE
 Hey Nick, are you going to quit?

Nick looks up and sees the waiting faces. He can't let down his fans.

NICK
Who's got a smoke?

Twenty ARMS fly forward, all offering different brands. Nick takes a cigarette from BR and lights up. As he attempts to inhale however, his legs buckle under him, and he falls to the ground. He's out cold.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick is dangling in his chair. Some office workers fan him and keep him up while others huddle at the door.

TRAINEE 2
Maybe you should start with filters.

BR ushers the coworkers out of Nick's office, then closes the door behind them.

BR
You okay?

NICK
I'm functioning.

BR
I'm giving some of your workload to Jeanette while you recover.

NICK
Not necessary.

BR
She's already been taking care of everything in your absence. Besides we can't have you pulling the old *Flosberry Flop* like that everywhere you go.

NICK
I'll be fine.

BR begins to leave, then stops for something.

BR
I heard the Holloway article is coming out tomorrow.

NICK
Really?

BR

Anything I should be worried about?

NICK

Yes. The Lung Association. Apparently, they have it in for us.

BR nods and leaves.

The second the door closes, Nick grabs the phone, dials, then cups the phone in secrecy.

HEATHER'S SERVICE

You've reached Heather Holloway at the Washington Post. I am unavailable. Please leave a message.

NICK

Heather, it's Nick. Really miss you... Listen, I heard your article. The one on tobacco and me... well, that it's going to print, tomorrow. That's great. I'd love to read it or talk to you... Just see how it turned out. You should call me, so I can read it, on my cell phone. Or at work. They can patch you through. And the other night was just great. We must do it again. But I'm really eager to see what you wrote. Really.

INT. CORRIDOR, ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick steps out.

NICK

(to Gizelle)

You can forward all calls to my cell.

GIZELLE

Like always.

NICK

Yes, exactly like always.

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

The MOD squad sits but does not eat.

BOBBY JAY

The Post called.

NICK

Really. What did they want?

BOBBY JAY

They wanted to check the spelling of my name and job title.

POLLY

You didn't tell her about us did you?

NICK

No, I mean, if anything, in passing.

POLLY

In passing?

BOBBY JAY

Oh god, he fucked her.

(to Nick)

I tried to warn you.

POLLY

He didn't fuck her.

(to Nick)

You didn't fuck her, did you?

Nick doesn't answer. Polly is besides herself.

POLLY

When?

BOBBY JAY

In passing.

NICK

Look, she's really a nice girl.

BOBBY JAY

Oh god, we're really fucked.

POLLY

I'll get a copy of tomorrow's Post.

NICK

You can do that?

POLLY

I'll have my advertisers get a copy.

NICK

Call me as soon as you've got something.

INT. NICK'S BMW - DAY

Nick drives through traffic, dialing his CELL PHONE.

HEATHER'S SERVICE

*You've reached Heather Holloway at the
Washington Post. I am unavailable. Please
leave a message.*

Nick ends the call.

INT. COPY ROOM - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick waits as a fax comes through. An assistant is about to enter, when she sees Nick and moves on.

Nick picks it up and begins to read. Through his eyes, we see his heart drop. As he continues to read down the first column, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANY SUBURBAN HOME - DC - THE NEXT MORNING

A man steps outside in his BATHROBE. He walks to the bottom of the driveway and picks up the morning paper.

The front page headline reads:

NICK NAYLOR'S SMOKESCREEN

I do it for the mortgage!

INT. PUBLIC BUS - MORNING

People ride to work. Many of them are reading the POST.

NICK (V.O.)

*Nick Naylor, lead spokesman for big
tobacco, would have you believe he thinks
cigarettes are harmless...*

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

People drink coffee, eat pastries, and read the POST.

NICK (V.O.)

*But really, he's doing it for the
mortgage...*

EXT. - DC STREET - MORNING

Polly walks up the street, reading the paper to herself.

POLLY (V.O.)

*The MOD squad, meaning of course
Merchants-Of-Death is comprised of Polly
Bailey of the Moderation Council and
Bobby Jay Bliss of the gun business's own
advisory group, SAFETY...*

INT. BOBBY JAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Bobby Jay sits at his desk, flanked by various Military trinkets and banners. He reads the POST.

BOBBY JAY (V.O.)

*As explained by Naylor, the sole purpose
of their meetings is to compete for the
highest death toll as they compare
strategies on how to dupe the American
people.*

INT. ESCALATORS - OFFICE MALL - DAY

Various office workers ride up the center of an atrium, reading the POST.

INT. JEFF MEGALL'S OFFICE - DAY

Jeff is handed a crisp copy of the article with hi-lighted sections. He immediately devours it...

JEFF (V.O.)

*Sector Six would emphasize the sex appeal
of cigarettes, in a way only floating
nude copulating hollywood stars could...*

INT. INTERNET CAFE - DAY

Students at computer terminals, read the article on the Washington Post Website.

INT. LORNE LUTCH'S RANCH - DAY

Lorne's FAX machine, albeit an ancient one, spits out the curled transmission. He reads:

LORNE (V.O.)

This did not stop Nick from bribing the dying man with a suitcase of cash to keep quiet on the subject of his recent lung cancer diagnosis...

INT. KITCHEN - JILL NAYLOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Joey runs into room expecting a snack, but instead finds Jill and Brad hovering over the POST.

JILL (V.O.)

Nick's own son Joey Naylor seems to be being groomed for the job, as he joins his father on the majority of his trips...

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ACADEMY OF TOBACCO STUDIES - DAY

Nick sits at his desk. He is a mess. He taps an unopened copy of the POST, when the intercom suddenly breaks the moment...

GIZELLE

(intercom)

I have Heather Holloway on one.

Nick leaps for the phone.

NICK

Heather.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HEATHER HOLLOWAY'S OFFICE - SAME

Heather is as cheery as the first time we met her.

HEATHER

Hey, Nick, what did you think?

Nick chooses every word carefully.

NICK

Heather, there is a lot of information in here, that is... off the record.

HEATHER

You never said anything about off the record.

NICK

I presumed, anything said while I was inside you was considered *privileged*.

HEATHER

Nick, you are really cute. If you wanted to talk on a plane or at a movie or over dinner, that would have been fine. But you wanted to fuck. That's fine by me.

Nick is stunned. Even insulted by this realization.

NICK

Wait a second. You used me?

HEATHER

(still friendly)

Come on Nick. Now we're being children. We both love our jobs. You're just a lobbyist and I'm just a reporter.

NICK

(confusion)

You used me.

HEATHER

I thought if anything, that you'd have an appreciation for my work.

NICK

How could you do this to me?

HEATHER

Oh, Nick. For the mortgage.

INT. BR'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick enters just as BR puts down the article.

NICK

That bitch.

BR

You should have been more careful, Nick.

NICK

I'll work up a rebuttal. Heather Holloway isn't the only reporter at the Post.

BR

There isn't going to be a rebuttal. Don't talk to anyone. We're pulling you from the congressional hearing.

NICK

You can't pull me from the hearing. All you'll be doing is giving credence to her article. I am ready to testify.

BR

Nick, half of my job is damage control. And today, that consists of distancing ourselves from you entirely and letting you take the heat on this article.

Nick begins to realize he is being fired.

BR

Your job relied on your ability to keep secrets and spin the truth. I can't imagine a way in which you could have fucked up more. There is just no way I could possibly keep you on staff.

NICK

And I assume you've already run this by the Captain?

BR

The Captain died this morning.

Nick stops. Everything stops.

INT. GATE 27 - DULLES AIRPORT - DAY

Nick is at the ticket agent's desk.

TICKET AGENT

All I have is the very last seat in the plane, sir. 36C.

Nick just nods.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT pushes the DRINK CART past Nick, hitting his knee. Nick looks for an apology, but nothing follows. Nick looks up and finds the permanently lit NON-SMOKING SIGN.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A large crowd has gathered to see a local hero be buried.
Very formal. All black. No grey.

Nick stands alone in the crowd.

A waiter from the Tobacco Club steps forward and places a MINT
JULEP on the Casket as it is lowered into the ground.

EXT. DULLES AIRPORT - DAY

Nick's flight touches down... roughly.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nick slumps into his apartment.

We hear the answering machine playing, as a "Baretta"
Marathon shows on television in the background.

ANSWERING MACHINE (O.C.)

*Mr. Naylor, this is Pete in security at
the Academy. Your things are waiting for
you at the information kiosk in the
lobby. Look, just pick'm up by Friday, or
we're supposed to throw'm away.*

JUMP CUT TO:

LATER

Another "Baretta" Episode. Nick empties his fridge.

ANSWERING MACHINE (O.C.)

*Nick, Jack in Jeff Megall's office. Jeff
really enjoyed meeting you the other day
and is sorry that you two couldn't find a
project to work on. Drop me a line
whenever you're in town. My e-mail is...*

JUMP CUT TO:

LATER

Another "Baretta" Episode. Nick alphabetizes his books/CD's.

ANSWERING MACHINE (O.C.)

*Mr. Naylor, this is Special Agent Johnson
with the FBI.*

(MORE)

ANSWERING MACHINE (CONT'D)

Having not found any leads in your kidnapping investigation, we will be handing over the case to local DC police. Please refer to them in the future for updates and questions...

JUMP CUT TO:

LATER

Nick is now upside down on his bed watching yet another episode of "Baretta", when there's a KNOCK at his door.

INT. ENTRYWAY - NICK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nick steps up to the door.

NICK
Who is it?

JILL (O.C.)
It's me, Nick.

NICK
Oh, Jill, this is a bad time... I'm trying to find that kung fu spot that kills a human body instantaneously.

JILL (O.C.)
Let me in Nick.

NICK
(thinks a beat)
No.

JILL (O.C.)
I brought someone who needs to talk to you.

Nick exhales, then opens the door. Jill brought Joey.

NICK
(to Joey)
There's a coke in the fridge.

Joey runs past his father to the kitchen. Jill takes a step forward, then stops next to Nick.

JILL
So, this Heather Holloway must've been pret-ty hot...

Nick goes to argue, then concedes...

NICK
Yeah, she's pretty hot.

JILL
Don't take it so hard. A few flaws can be appealing. It makes you human.

NICK
(without flinching)
Who wants to be human?

JILL
I know one person who still thinks you're a god.

Nick looks back towards the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN, NICK'S APARTMENT - SAME

Nick and Joey sit at the kitchen table, each slumped on their elbows, mirroring each other in identical positions.

JOEY
Why did you tell that reporter all your secrets?

NICK
You're too young to understand.

JOEY
Mom says it's because you have dependency issues and it was just a matter of time before you threw it all away on some tramp.

Nick pauses.

NICK
Well, that's one theory.

JOEY
Why are you hiding from everybody?

NICK
It has something to with being generally hated right now.

JOEY
But it's your job to be generally hated.

Nick smiles.

NICK

It's more complicated than that.

JOEY

You're just making it more complicated so you can feel sorry for yourself.

Nick raises an eyebrow.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Like you always said, "If you want an easy job, go work for the Red Cross." You're a lobbyist. Your job is to be right and you're the best at what you do. You're the "Sultan of spin"...

NICK

Sultan of spin?

JOEY

(quickly)

Mom subscribes to Newsweek.

(back to his pitch)

Who cares what the Brads of the world think? He's not my dad. You are.

Nick looks into Joey's eyes.

NICK (V.O.)

And right there, looking into Joey's eyes, it all came back in a rush... Why I do what I do...

CUT TO:

EXT. G8 SUMMIT - DAY

UNBATHED TEENAGERS with "ideals" are protesting behind barricades. Nick passes through the shouting crowd with a calm smile on his face, unflinching, as people hurl insults and rocks towards police in riot gear.

NICK (V.O.)

Defending the defenseless... Protecting the disenfranchised corporations that have been abandoned by their very own consumers...

CUT TO:

OUTRAGEOUS KODAK MOMENTS OF:

NICK (V.O.)
The logger.

A LOGGER - about to cut down the last tree in an acre of stumps. He poses with his chainsaw and smiles to camera.

CUT TO:

NICK (V.O.)
The sweat shop foreman.

A SWEAT SHOP FOREMAN smiling with his clipboard as countless children make shoes in the background.

CUT TO:

NICK (V.O.)
The oil driller.

An OIL DRILLER and his SON smiling as the drilling mechanism behind them bores into the Pacific Ocean floor.

CUT TO:

NICK (V.O.)
The land mine developer.

A LAND MINE DEVELOPER presenting a newly designed land mine to his underlings. They all look up and smile.

CUT TO:

NICK (V.O.)
The baby seal poacher.

A SEAL PELT TRADER holding a beaten baby seal, looks up and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. BERT'S RESTAURANT - DAY

The MOD SQUAD is at their booth.

POLLY
Baby seal poacher?

BOBBY JAY
Even I think that's kind of cruel.

NICK

Okay, you're missing the point.

POLLY

I must be, because I thought you were apologizing.

NICK

I'm getting to that. Look, you two are basically my only friends. The last thing I ever wanted to do was hurt either of you. I can only imagine how the two of you must have felt...

Bobby Jay cracks a smile. Nick stops in question of the look.

NICK

(to Bobby Jay)

Why are you smiling?

(immediately to Polly)

Why is he smiling?

POLLY

He won a hundred bucks on you.

Nick shoots a further confused look.

BOBBY JAY

I bet Polly that you'd spill the beans with that reporter.

NICK

That goes against everything we stand for.

POLLY

You ratted us out to some reporter with tits.

BOBBY JAY

(correcting)

Glorious tits.

NICK

Only after you created a betting pool, testing my incompetence. If anything, I thought we had mutual professional courtesy.

POLLY

Do you know the beating I've been taking at Moderation?

NICK

I know both of you are probably under a lot of scrutiny...

POLLY

You can stop using the plural.

Nick looks to Bobby Jay for an explanation.

BOBBY JAY

The guys at SAFETY actually like the name, Merchants of Death. They're going to make bumper stickers. I'll get you one.

A WAITRESS arrives with a piece of APPLE PIE with a SLICE OF AMERICAN CHEESE melted on top for Bobby Jay.

NICK

That's disgusting.

BOBBY JAY

(mid-bite)
It's American.

Nick shrugs (point taken).

POLLY

Well, I guess you won't be appearing at Finistirre's sub-committee.

NICK

I was kind of looking forward to it too. It's kind of cool in a Jimmy Stewart sort of way.

BOBBY JAY

More like an Ollie North sort of way.

POLLY

Finistirre would have torn you a new asshole, in a house of parliament, no less.

NICK

Oh, please. I could have taken him.

BOBBY JAY
What would you've said?

NICK
I don't know...

Nick is mesmerized by the sizzling cheese on Bobby Jay's pie.

NICK
...I think I'd just like him to feel
immeasurable pain and humiliation.

BOBBY JAY
(Joking)
That'll be tough, I mean he's a Senator.

All three laugh.

NICK
(compliments Bobby Jay)
Good one.

Nick thinks a little more.

POLLY
I mean, how would you get back in even if
you wanted to?...

Nick looks at his fellow mod squad members and smiles.

BOBBY JAY
Uh oh. He has a plan.

CUT TO:

INT. SENATOR FINISTIRRE'S OFFICE - DAY

The Senator is at his desk, examining a list, when Ron Goode enters and turns on the TV - Nick at a PRESS CONFERENCE.

NICK (ON TV)
... To all the people who were mentioned
in the recent newspaper article, please
take comfort in knowing that I will not
rest until your names are cleared. This
experience has taught me an important
lesson: Having sexual affairs with
members of the press is just unfair. Not
unfair to me mind you, but to all the
people in my life whose only crime is
knowing me.

(MORE)

NICK(CONT'D)

It was your names, not mine, that suffered from my entertaining of a meaningless affair with a seductress in the form of a young blond Washington Post reporter, whose name I won't mention, because I... have dignity.

Finistirre simply grunts at this.

NICK (ON TV)

There have been wide accusations of me dropping out from tomorrow's senate subcommittee. Let it be known, that unless Senator Finistirre has withdrawn my invitation to speak...

FINISTIRRE

(to TV)

It's called a subpoena.

NICK (ON TV)

... it is my plan to be present in Congress tomorrow to share my knowledge of Big Tobacco and all those who enjoy its products. Thank you for your time. See you tomorrow.

As Nick steps away from the podium on TV, we turn around to find Finistirre who stares at the television, feeling every bit challenged.

As we get closer, a phone rings in the background. Then a second line rings... A third.

The Senator looks to his desk, where his phone's many lines are all blinking.

He goes to his desk, and pulls out a sheet that reads:

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Tobacco Subcommittee

He follows the sheet down, past a list of names. At the bottom he adds the name, NICK NAYLOR.

CUT TO:

EXT. DC SKYLINE - MORNING

The Sun bursts out from behind various monuments.

EXT. THE CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

From a limo window, we see the press quickly approaching, but all we hear is the sound of an on-coming wave. As the press hits the car, the wave sound crashes as if hitting a beach.

Inside the car are a very shocked Nick, Bobby Jay, and Polly.

BOBBY JAY

Still feel like Jimmy Stewart?

EXT. THE CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

The MOD Squad fighting the on coming press as they approach the main entrance.

INT. ENTRANCE - CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

Nick and Polly walk through the metal detector. Bobby Jay tries to walk through, but sets off the machine.

BOBBY JAY

(to Nick and Polly)

Go ahead. This may take a while.

A SECURITY GUARD approaches with the WAND. Bobby Jay has nothing but disdain for metal detectors.

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY

A A/V OPERATOR plugs in a mic sitting on the RED TABLECLOTH on the witnesses table. He gives a thumbs across the room, where... A/V OPERATOR 2 turns on the P.A. system. The room comes alive with a *BOOM*.

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - DAY

The hearing is just beginning. Senator Finistirre and nine of his colleagues sit at a long table before the audience. Each one has a pitcher of water and a microphone. Finistirre scans the audience, then begins.

FINISTIRRE

Okay, lets bring this meeting to order.
We'll try our best to keep everything
brief and concise, so we can all make it
out of here on time.

Finistirre smiles at his audience.

FINISTIRRE

Okay...

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A MEDICAL ADVISOR is testifying.

MEDICAL ADVISOR

The skull and crossbones means one thing: Poison. Thus, the message is quite clear. Like any other product that carries the branding, if you take it, you will die.

FINISTIRRE

Is this not overkill? I mean, why not just use words as we currently do? Something that describes the dangers of cigarettes?

MEDICAL ADVISOR

The American public is not affected by mast head anymore. They need photographs. We've done studies which show that consumers react up to eighty percent more to imagery rather than words. The stats are there. It's just sad that the Academy of Tobacco Studies did not release this type of information earlier...

FINISTIRRE

And when you say the Academy of Tobacco Studies, you are referring to the coalition represented by...

FREEZE FRAME on the Senator.

NICK (V.O.)

Let it be known, the public beating has not gone out of style.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

LATINO MAN

The current use of words instead of imagery is an obvious move against the non-English speaking population in the United States.

(MORE)

LATINO MAN(CONT'D)

The skull and crossbones speaks loudly in all languages. By not using it, they are saying they want those who can't read English to die.

FINISTIRRE

I'm sorry Senor Herera, could you please clarify "they"...

CUT TO:

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Finistirre looks down at his agenda and smiles.

FINISTIRRE

Nick Naylor, please step forward.

Nick stands. He turns around as he fixes his suit coat. As he does, he notices someone in the audience. Sitting ten rows back is... Joey. The twelve year old sneaks an excited wave. Nick suddenly becomes uncomfortable. He waves back, but we can tell he is bothered.

BAILIFF

Please state your name, address, and current occupation.

NICK

My name is Nick Naylor. I live at the Watergate. I am currently unemployed, but until recently, I was the Vice President of the Academy of Tobacco Studies.

FINISTIRRE

Mr. Naylor, as Vice President of the Academy of Tobacco Studies, what was required of you? What did you do?

NICK

I informed the public of all the research performed in the investigation on the effects of tobacco.

FINISTIRRE

And what, so far, has the Academy concluded in the investigation on the effects of tobacco?

NICK

Well, many things actually. Why just the other day, they uncovered evidence that smoking can offset Parkinson's disease.

FINISTIRRE

I'm sure the health community is thrilled. Mr. Naylor, Who provides the financial backing for the Academy of Tobacco Studies?

NICK

Conglomerated Tobacco.

FINISTIRRE

(clarifying)

That is the cigarette companies?

NICK

For the most part, yes.

FINISTIRRE

Do you think this affects their priorities?

NICK

No. Just as I'm sure campaign contributions don't affect yours.

Senator LOTHRIDGE from Washington pipes in, to break it up.

LOTHRIDGE

Gentlemen, Mr. Naylor is not here to testify on the goings on of the Academy of Tobacco Studies. We're here to examine the possibility of a warning logo on cigarettes. Now, Mr. Naylor, I have to ask out of formality, do you believe that smoking cigarettes over time can lead to lung cancer and other respiratory conditions such as emphysema?

Finistirre rolls his eyes. (*What do you think?*)

A long pause, as Nick searches through everything. The people in this room. The people watching on television. The people watching down from heaven.

NICK

Yes.

Finistirre looks up in astonishment as the whole room suddenly bustles with energy. Polly and Bobby Jay exchange glances.

NICK

In fact, I think you'd be hard pressed to find someone who really believes that cigarettes are not potentially harmful.

(turns to audience)

I mean, show of hands...

LOTHRIDGE

Mr. Naylor, there is no need for theatrics.

NICK

I'm sorry, I just don't see the point in a warning label for something people already know.

Senator DUPREE from Michigan joins in.

DUPREE

The warning symbol is a reminder of the dangers of smoking cigarettes.

NICK

Well, if we want to remind people of danger, why don't we slap a skull and crossbones on all Boeing Airplanes, Senator Lothridge...

We notice for the first time, Lothridge's name plate says (D) WASHINGTON.

NICK

... and all Fords, Senator Dupree.

Dupree's name plate says (R) MICHIGAN.

FINISTIRRE

That's just ridiculous. The death toll on passenger planes and car fatalities doesn't even skim the surface of cigarettes. They don't even compare.

NICK

Oh, this from a Senator who calls Vermont, home.

Finistirre raises an eyebrow.

LOTHRIDGE

I don't follow, Mr. Naylor.

NICK

Well the real demonstrated number-one killer in America is cholesterol.

Still stares. Nick continues.

NICK

And here comes Senator Finistirre, whose fine state is, I regret to say, clogging the nation's arteries with Vermont cheddar cheese. If you want to talk numbers, how about the millions of people dying of heart attacks. Perhaps Vermont cheddar should come with a skull and crossbones.

FINISTIRRE

You little...

Lothridge covers Finistirre's mic so we don't hear the word, "shit". Finistirre is fuming. Lothridge cools him down.

Nick looks back at Joey who gives him the thumbs up.

LOTHRIDGE

Mr. Naylor, we are here to discuss cigarettes. Not any other products. Now, as discussed earlier, these warning labels are not for those who know, but rather for those who don't. What about the children?

NICK

Gentlemen, it's called education. It doesn't come off the side of a cigarette carton. It comes from our teachers and more importantly our parents. It is every parents' job to warn their children of all the dangers of the world, including cigarettes. So one day, when they get older, they can make an educated choice. Not to be corny, but that is what this country is supposed to be all about. Some say it takes a village to raise a child. I disagree. It takes two parents. And sometimes, just one.

Nick looks back at his son.

NICK

I look at my son today, and I can't help think of myself as responsible for his growth and his development. And I'm proud of that.

FINISTIRRE

In that case, Mr. Naylor, would you condone him smoking?

NICK

Of course not, he's not eighteen. That would be illegal.

FINISTIRRE

Yes, I heard you deliver the same response on 20/20. But enough dancing. What about when he does turn eighteen?

Nick is momentarily speechless.

FINISTIRRE

Come on Mr. Naylor? On your son's eighteenth birthday, will you share a cigarette? Enjoy the afternoon like one of those sick tobacco advertisements? You certainly have a lot to say on how we should raise our children. What of your own? What will you do when he turns eighteen?

Joey looks to his father.

Nick looks up at the various senators. He takes a breath.

NICK

If he really wants a cigarette... I'll buy him his first pack.

Joey smiles proudly.

Finistirre rocks back.

FINISTIRRE

Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Naylor.

Nick nods and stand up to leave. As he does, many of the spectators stand to leave with him out into the...

INT. MAIN FOYER, CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

Nick, now surrounded by REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, ADMIRERS, and DETRACTORS, tries to make his way outside. Somehow, the crowd separates momentarily and BR squeezes in next to Nick.

BR
Well done, my boy!

Nick looks over, confused. *My boy?*

NICK
Were you in the same room as me?

BR
The whole personal choice thing. They ate up that shit. We checked the whip count. The bill is going down in flames. Your speech was... unorthodox, but you did it... You crushed the fucker.

NICK
That's great news for you guys.

BR
Hey, now. We're still a team, right?

NICK
What about, "damage control"?

Nick and BR stop at the MAIN DOORS. The crowd still surrounding them.

BR
(levels with him)
Look, Nick. Winston-Salem is ready to do whatever it takes to keep you on board...

Nick thinks for a moment, then smiles.

EXT. THE MAIN STEPS, CAPITAL BUILDING - DAY

Nick and his son Joey stand on the main steps, surrounded by reporters. Joey looks to his dad with pride.

REPORTER 1
Nick, will you continue to fight for cigarettes?

BR enters and puts his arm around Nick.

BR

Of course he will! This man here is our general. We're not going to just let him retire.

REPORTER 2

Is that correct, Nick? You're sticking with tobacco?

NICK

(smiles, then...)

Smoking is a personal freedom that is enjoyed by countless Americans, and although I cannot smoke anymore due to my injurious kidnapping, I believe in protecting all freedoms...

Meanwhile, as Nick continues, we take a look at JOEY. He's so proud of his dad. So proud, that he opens a pack of MARLBORO REDS and pulls out a cigarette. He takes it between his fingers and raises it to his twelve year old LIPS.

Out of the corner of Nick's eye, he sees his son about to lock onto a cigarette. And before Nick can stop himself, his arm whips down and SLAPS the cigarette out of his son's mouth.

We see this repeat through the eyes of the cameras:

C-SPAN - SLAP!

MSNBC - SLAP!

CNN - SLAP!

CBS - SLAP!

The cigarette flies through the air in super Slo-Mo as:

Camera men smile.

Videotape rolls.

A SATELLITE circles the Earth.

Controllers in a TV STUDIO switch to camera A.

Multiple TELEVISIONS broadcast the event in a window of an electronics shop in Tokyo.

And of course... BR's eyes bulge in horror.

AND THEN:

The cigarette hits the ground. Nothing big. Just drops.

P.O.V. - One of the TV cameras. Slightly shaky close-up of the cigarette sitting on the Capital Steps. It looks pathetic.

NICK (V.O.)

My father gave me one word of advice
before he died: Prioritize.

FADE OUT.

NICK (V.O.)

So, what happens to a guy a like me? I
know what you're probably thinking...

Close of a PAIR OF LOAFERS standing on the ledge of a
skyscraper. One foot steps out over the edge, then FREEZES.

NICK (V.O.)

No, nothing like that. In fact, not much
has changed.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL GAME - DAY

NICK (V.O.)

The MOD squad still meets every week.

We find Nick, Bobby Jay, and Polly sitting in the stands.
Joey catches a long fly ball in right field. The MOD squad
screams in celebration as Joey's team runs to the dugout.

INT. ACCESS HOLLYWOOD INTERVIEW - DAY

NICK (V.O.)

Senator Finistirre is still fighting for
his causes.

Finistirre is interviewed by a plastic HOLLYWOOD INTERVIEWER.

FINISTIRRE

Movies are ruining our children. Every
time they see an actor engaging in
violence, casual sex, or smoking, they
lose a year on their childhood.

HOLLYWOOD INTERVIEWER

What's your favorite movie?

FINISTIRRE

Well you can't mess with a classic. I
love West Side Story.

HOLLYWOOD INTERVIEWER

Doesn't that have violence, casual sex,
and smoking?

Finistirre fumes.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

NICK (V.O.)

Even Heather is still reporting.

Heather and a CAMERA MAN for some expose show stand outside a
New York BROWNSTONE. Sean Penn steps out the front door.

HEATHER

Sean, is it true...?

Penn punches her in the face, leveling her to the ground.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL GAME - DAY

Nick is lost in his thoughts.

NICK (V.O.)

Not much changes at all.

POLLY

Nick, Bobby Jay has some big news.

NICK

You were able to knock the spotted owl
off of the endangered species list?

BOBBY JAY

(complete sincerity)

Yes.

NICK

Wow, I can finally go kill myself a
spotted owl.

BOBBY JAY

You could kill ten spotted owls.

The MOD squad clink their plastic coke cups in celebration.

NICK (V.O.)
Nothing changes at all. Even at my new
job...

INT. BOARD ROOM - UNKNOWN COMPANY - DAY

Nick faces three GENTLEMEN in nice suits.

NICK
So, be straight with me. Is it true?

Obvious embarrassment and confusion around the table.

GENTLEMEN 1
It could be.

GENTLEMEN 2
Well, we don't quite know that. It's
complicated.

GENTLEMEN 3
Very few cases, really.

NICK
Look, gentlemen. Practice these words in
front of a mirror: 'Although we are
constantly exploring the subject,
currently, there is no direct evidence that
links cell phone usage to brain cancer.'

The gentlemen smile to each other. They've found their man.

Push into Nick. He looks straight at camera and smiles.

NICK (V.O.)
Michael Jordan plays ball. Charles Manson
kills people. I talk.

BLACK

NICK (V.O.)
Everyone has a talent.