

The book cover features a dark, atmospheric background with intricate, swirling patterns of white, ethereal smoke or mist. Two pairs of intense, blue eyes are visible, looking directly at the viewer. The eyes are framed by dark, shadowed eyelids and have a slightly bloodshot appearance. The overall mood is mysterious and haunting.

**Julius Chance**

**GREGORY**

18+

# Julius Chance Gregory

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## **Аннотация**

Quitting bad habit had always been hard. Instead of trying do to so yourself, you may turn to the divine "authoritty" of smoking. One pal did exactly so. What would come out of it? No one can imagine... The cover image is taken from the pixabay website under CCO license.

# Julius Chance Gregory

You are my creator, but I am your master...  
("Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley)

Serge angrily crumbled the smoking cigarette butt onto the tea plate (he had thrown away all ashtrays long ago). One more attempt to quit smoking failed ... Just a few minutes ago the image of a smoking cigarette and the acute sensation of a puff seemed to be so attractive that he again could not resist and shamefacedly went around to ask his neighbors for a cigarette. He deliberately did not go to the kiosk to buy a whole pack. Such amount would not be needed. This cigarette was supposed to be just one more and, this time, certainly the last, the very last one. Now, when the craving for nicotine was satisfied, the charm of a blue haze in his mind was again replaced by depression, arising from the realization that he was simply incapable of quitting. Serge knew that the neighbors were already sneering at him. Truck driver Basil from the fifth floor this time did not give him a smoke at all. He said that he allegedly did not have it, although, Serge knew for sure, he always had. Only old retired Maxim from the first floor helped him out. Perhaps, it would be better even if he also refused! The smoked cigarette canceled out a week of abstinence torment and broke the remaining willpower into

pieces. Serge felt that this cigarette would not be the last again. In frustration, he stared at the television. The program was about the ancient pagan gods of the Maya. It was already finishing, but Serge noticed that those gods were constantly smoking. And one of them had a smoking cigar sticking out right from his forehead. Melodious like mild cocaine in blood, the idea slowly crept into Serge's head. He jumped over to the computer and entered the key phrase into a search engine: 'how to appeal to the smoking god of Maya.'

Candles, cigarettes, matches and a saucer of water were at the ready. The huge full moon shone through the window. Serge turned off the lights, lit candles, lit a cigarette and blew out smoke over the saucer and began the mantra:

“O Great God of smoking, I beg You come and help me; oh Great God of smoking, I beg You come and help me ...”

An hour passed, but nothing happened. Already losing hope, Serge yet stubbornly continued to blow out smoke over the saucer and repeat the mantra again and again. Finally, having lost faith in success completely and intending to stop the ritual, Serge suddenly heard a pleasant male baritone from behind his back:

“Stop whining already, here I am, here, for the whole hour. The proverb is right: ‘make a fool pray to God and he will smash his forehead’.”

Numb with fear, Serge turned slowly behind. In an armchair was sitting a man of heavenly beauty in his forties in an

impeccable silver-gray suit of modern cut. His head was crowned with hair of steel-colored smoke. Serge was rendered speechless.

“Would you excuse me for having seated in your armchair without an invitation? You understand that it would be improper for a deity to ask permission from mere mortal, don’t you?” the guest pronounced to defuse the situation utterly confusing to beggar.

“On TV You was pictured with a cigar in your forehead,” Serge timidly uttered.

The man took two blue cigarettes from his jacket pocket and handed one over to Serge. The second one he lit for himself. The delicious scent filled the room. Serge dragged on and instantly felt more euphoria than that of marijuana.

“You confused me with our supreme Maya god, the so-called god K. He is somewhat like Zeus for the ancient Greeks. It is not a cigar that sticks out of his forehead, but a red-hot knife made of obsidian, volcanic glass. I am called the god L, according to your earthly terminology. I’m his junior business partner.”

“The gods also have business partners, then?” Serge wondered at his stoned consciousness.

“In this hypostasis I am called the Egregor of Smoking, but you can simply call me Gregory.”

Only now Serge did fully realize that everything that was happening around him was real and rushed on to pursue his goal:

“I do really want to quit smoking, I've tried everything: nicotine pills, plasters, hypnosis, prayers and ...”

“I know, I know,” Gregory interrupted him.

“Tell me, why all these turned out to be ineffective? How do you hold us bound to Yourself so tight?”

“Craving for nicotine is only part of the smoker’s problem. The psychological component is much more important. We have specially conceived that the day of the smoker is divided by smoke breaks into about twenty periods. Approximately every 40 minutes, the average smoker has a kind of legal rest, not only mental and physical, but, moreover, psychological as well. It serves as a refuge from the monotony of work and life. When the abandoner is confronted with the ‘continuity’ of existence, then plasters, pills and hypnosis cannot help him. Especially the urge to insert ‘truce’ segments into the battle of the day in order to take a break, increases under stress.”

“That is, if you drink tea many times a day to distract yourself, the chances of quitting smoking do increase?”

“Right. But this will not help you either – the willpower does not suffice, sorry for being straightforward,” Gregory blew a stream of smoke into Serge’s face.

“Why didn't Jesus help me?” Serge asked, swallowing the offense.

“Trust in God, but don't give a slack to yourself,” the eregor grinned.

“Did He really exist? Is He really a God? ” Serge blurted out and straight away got frightened by the blasphemy of his question.

“You see, from our egregorian point of view, it doesn’t really matter whether Jesus was a god then or not. If the mass of the people now believes in him, then he is now. And the more believers and the stronger their faith, the more God he is.”

“Have You ever met Christ yourself, there, in heaven?” Serge could not calm down.

“I saw him, but we have not met. We exploit your vices while he relieves you of them. Therefore, he considers us to be evil spirits. Nevertheless, we still honor him as one of the greatest among egregors,” the high guest said.

“Will you help me even if He didn’t?” Serge continued to moan.

“Yes, but one have to pay for everything,” Gregory stated.

“I’m ready, but what can I give you? You already have everything?” Serge exclaimed.

“Render God’s things to God, Caesar’s – to Caesar, and Gregory’s to Gregory,” the egregor replied.

“What do you mean?”

“Emanations, my friend, emanations. We are the energetic entities. We feed ourselves from the energy of our human herds, like the ancient tantric gods did.”

“Somewhat abstract for me,” Serge admitted.

“Every time you take a puff, I give you a little bit of euphoria to catch. But in return I take for myself two or three such pieces from your health,” the heavenly guest explained.

“It is so merciful, because you, the Gods, could take at least a

hundred pieces for one,” Serge reasoned.

“The greed will kill the thug,” god L disagreed.

“It turns out that you, the Creators of the world, do use our earthly proverbs too?”

“Actually, you are my creator.”

“How so?”

“Back in the Stone Age, when the first of the Mayans lit a roll of tobacco leaves and experienced euphoria, the first energetic emanation of smoking was sent into Space, and I was conceived.”

“Immaculately?” Serge blurted out inadvertently.

Gregory looked at Serge as at a fool. He hesitated, whether he should laugh, or severely punish the reckless interlocutor right here and now. A pause hung in the air. Serge sensed danger and hurried to apologize:

“Forgive a stupid lost sheep of God.”

“Hm ... better call yourself a sheep from my flock,” the egregor frowned.

“Well, I’m ready to be your sheep, just save me from my nasty habit!” Serge begged.

“But in order for the sheep to leave, it must bring in its place another sheep, or rather ten. Is it logical?”

“Why ten and not one?” Serge wondered.

“Because there’s no reason for me to bother opening and closing the corral if the number of sheep does not increase.”

“Well, then one sheep could bring two; one for itself and the second for the trouble at the gate.”



“What about overheads?”

“Then three.”

“And what about business development?”

“Well, four.”

“And taxes?”

“Let it be five.”

“Plus business profit?”

“It turns out six.”

“Nice number, but my last word is nine. Deal?”

“What do you mean?”

“In order to release yourself from the smoking habit, you must bring nine new smokers to my realm,” Gregory clarified to the gullible client.

“No, I can't go for such a deal,” Serge squeezed the phrase out of himself with effort.

“Can't you..? Well, it's up to you, but you still have to pay for my visit. Accountant, bring an estimate of our transport and other costs!” the egregor snapped his fingers the way a waiter is usually called in restaurant. An elderly, presentable accounting lady with gray-haired smoke floated into the room and handed him a sheet of layouts.

“So, according to the recalculating table, for such transgression he's sentenced to get a cancer to one of his lungs. Will he survive?” Gregory asked, looking at the numbers.

“Yes, but disabled. One his lung will be cut off,” the lady reported.

“Okay, let’s close the deal,” the eregor ordered.

And at the same moment Serge suddenly felt a hellish pain in his chest.

“But I didn't know, I'm sorry,” he squeaked.

“Ignorance of the law does not absolve you from guilt. Do you think that I have nothing else to do apart from rushing around with escort personnel on fake calls? I’m not a boy already; I’m not a thousand year old anymore. Good luck!” Gregory stood up from his chair.

“Okay, I’ll sign,” Serge howled in pain.

“Great! Lawyer, notary!” Gregory sat down and snapped his fingers again. The pain in Serge’s chest stopped instantly. Out of nowhere, two girls, one with hair of white smoke, the other of black one, clattered on high heels into the room. The blonde put the ready-made contract in triplicate onto the table.

“Please, sign here, here and here, where the check marks are,” she pointed out.

“And pay attention to the paragraphs of section two about the obligations of the parties and section five about the responsibility of the parties,” Gregory advised.

Serge took the contract and began to read it. The letters jumped before his eyes.

“Why was the agreement dated two weeks earlier?” Serge tried to find a reason to delay inevitable.

“Because the Gregorian calendar is used, as indicated right under the date of the treaty,” eregor repulsed his correction

attempt.

“That is, having made nine people smokers, I lose my desire to smoke at all? Completely?”

“No cravings, as if you had never ever smoked at all.”

“How will I attract new clients? What exactly am I supposed to do?”

“We will give you nine super-cigarettes. Anyone who smokes just one of them will immediately turn into a smoker. As though he or she would have been smoking for five years. Your task is to seduce nine non-smokers under age of thirty within nine months since now. In section number two of the contract, everything is stipulated. Read!”

“And if I do not find so many clients within the specified period?”

“Excuse me, for long nine months? Then you will have one your cancerous lung cut off, as you heard. The disease has already started. Anyone who smokes a super-cigarette will weaken your illness, and the last one will heal you completely. Read point five carefully.”

Serge took a pen, signed a contract and immediately felt himself a scum. The notary and the lawyer straight away took their copies of the agreement from the table, went out of the room into the corridor and disappeared there into nowhere, like a haze.

The egregor put a pack of super-cigarettes on the table.

“In case you inattentively read the fifth point, I draw your

attention to the fact that for each of these nine cigarettes you are responsible not with your lungs, but with your head. None should be wasted. It is an expensive high-tech product. And, I warn you, do not try to cheat! Albeit you are my creator, I am your Master!”

Serge could not utter a word. Gregory fatherly patted him onto the shoulder and followed his staff. Shocked, Serge looked at his watch. It showed one in the morning.

The alarm clock rang. Waking up from a semi-drowsy state, Serge sat down on the bed with difficulty. He did not sleep all night. The sleeping pills had no effect. Fortunately, he had wisely taken a day off from his work. He looked out of the window – everything appeared as usual: the slanting rays of the sun shining onto the stripes and spots of yellow autumn grass; passers-by hurried for work; stray cats slowly crawling out of hiding places. Everything was so mundane, that for a moment Serge thought that event that has happened at night was simply untrue, just a nightmare. But then his glance fell on the agreement on the table. He bleakly sighed, took one of yesterday’s cigarette butts out of the plate, lit it up and smoked. To be certain, he decided to have his lungs checked by a doctor.

The doctor scowled at the results of blood tests, then at the X-ray of the chest and finally said:

“Honestly, the picture is not so good, as well as the blood tests ... no, nothing catastrophic – markers of tuberculosis or cancer

have not been detected yet ... but if you do not immediately quit smoking, then, I am afraid, the consequences will be dire. It is strange to me that three months ago you did a fluorography with us and it was good.”

“I’ll quit, I’ll definitely quit, doctor”, Serge assured. His voice trembled.

The contract has already begun to be fulfilled. Serge left the clinic and walked to the church.

“Father, I want to confess,” Serge spoke in a hoarse voice to the stately priest.

“I am not a father, I am a deacon. In our church, Archpriest Gregory confesses an hour before the evening service. Today you are already late, so come tomorrow,” the priest looked at the grief-stricken Serge and added affectionately, “our lost sheep.”

Upon hearing the name of the priest and deacon’s last phrase, Serge was taken aback. He doubted that the father and the deacon was the same person. But still, such coincidences seemed to him very odd. Serge recalled Gregory’s warning and hurriedly left the church.

For several hours Serge wandered the streets in thoughts. All sorts of nonsense climbed into his head. For example, why not to report Gregory to the police? Serge understood that it could neither save him, nor catch the deacon, but his mind desperately continued to look for a way out.

“Serge, hello, why so gloomy?” someone pushed him into the shoulder. Serge raised his eyes. His school friend Alex stood right before him.

“Hello! I just talked to the god of all smokers yesterday,” Serge confessed in order to test the perception of his situation by others.

“To whom? Ha-ha! You should’ve work as a humorist on television! Huge talent is wasted” Alex laughed.

“I’m quite serious,” Serge persisted.

“Well, I turn here, bye!” Alex giggled and stepped aside along the path between buildings.

The dialogue with Alexei convinced Serge that he could not tell his misfortune to anyone in order to keep himself out of the guarded institutions for the mentally ill. For an hour or two he walked along the streets aimlessly in prostration.

“Excuse me, could you treat us with cigarettes? ” a silvery girlish voice brought Serge out of his stupor. Three girls of about sixteen stood right before him, smiling shyly. The most impudent, red-haired, was just a step apart from him, and the other two, brown-haired, were three meters away. Serge got delighted with the unexpected luck and hastily pulled out three contract cigarettes from the pack in the breast pocket of his shirt. The girl rewarded him with a milk-white smile. Serge looked fascinated at her healthy teeth, not yet spoiled by nicotine, and his hand with cigarettes froze halfway.

“Well, we're waiting!” the girl coquettishly hurried up.

“Minors are not allowed to smoke!” Serge suddenly barked so scarily that the girls backed away from him in fear. Then he quickly walked away and ... lit one of these cigarettes himself.

Around midnight, passersby called an ambulance for a young man who had fallen in the street. The paramedics arrived twenty minutes later and stated his death. The police found nothing suspicious, apart from a pack of cigarette «Gregory» with nine butts inside.