

Smoking Kills

by fyiagcg

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So do lots of things.

smoking kills

Chapter 1 of 1

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Angela was 22 years old, and she had been smoking for 4 years. She had started smoking cigarettes on her 18th birthday, thinking it was either that or go to a strip club. Later, she would joke that if only she'd remembered that gambling became legal at 18 and had just bought a lottery ticket, she could have saved thousands. It hadn't been an instant addiction. She had smoked one or two a day, then three or four. Gradually, she needed a cigarette after even the smallest of meals, right after waking up and right before going to bed, and any time she had a drink in her hands. Now, at 22, Angela enjoyed her cigarette breaks. During boring classes, she would get antsy, thinking about break-time, when she could light up a Marlboro Red and exhale all the United States History. At work, she would stare at the clock, counting down minutes until she could get out of the store and savor 5 minutes of pure, non-customer related relaxation. When lying in bed at home, she would toss and turn until finally sneaking outside for a few quick drags, before returning to her room and sleeping soundly.

Angela knew it was an addiction, but there were much worse things to be addicted to, she reasoned. She didn't do drugs, not even marijuana. She didn't drink more than a glass of wine with dinner or a few beers on her nights out with the girls. She didn't compulsively steal things, lie, or have sex with trees. So why did everybody give her such a hard time?

Her parents hated that she smoked. Both being doctors, they knew all of the risks associated with cigarettes. The told her repeatedly that she was risking cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and stinky breath. Her mother warned her that no man would ever want to kiss her if she tasted like an ashtray, and her father told her that no employer would give her a job if she reeked of cigarette smoke when walking into an interview.

People on the street would walk up to her to berate her 'disgusting habit.' One woman that passed her almost every day on her walk to her first class of the morning would cough, so loudly that it couldn't be anything but fake, and glare at her. Angela was told on almost a daily basis by classmates that 'Smoking is bad for your health,' to which she liked to reply "Well, pissing me off is bad for yours." She was a big girl, sometimes squeezing into her size 16 jeans and usually not proud of her size, but anyone who knew her was aware that she hit 'like a girl' and wasn't much of a threat to anybody. When complete strangers arrogantly told her that smoking could kill her, she would throw her cigarette on the ground and mash it out with the toe of her shoe, then thank them profusely for saving her life, gushing "My God, thank goodness you told me! I will never smoke again! Really, they should have warnings on the packages or something. If I had known it wasn't healthy I never would have started!" She would shake their hands and brush away a stray, imaginable tear and thank them profusely for saving her life, turn, take a few steps, and then light up another cigarette. When her coworkers gave her a hard time about the disgusting habit, she would ask if they drove to work, ate lunch, or ever slept. At the answer of yes, she would remind them that they could just as easily die *today* doing any of those things.

Angela enjoyed smoking. Sure, she might prefer it if she could walk up a few flights of stairs without getting winded, and yes, when she got a cold it lasted a bit longer than her non-smoking friends' did. Was there a chance of Cancer? It had been proven after all. But Angela was adopted, so she knew that without a complete family history, she would have to be tested regularly for all of those things that might run in her blood anyway. But all in all, smoking was her choice and her right and she enjoyed it. She knew she would stop eventually, but not today and not tomorrow, but when the time was right and she didn't feel like smoking anymore.

One night, Angela left work early. She was having another terrible headache, like she'd been getting for the past few months. A lot of stress had triggered it, as stress always had given her headaches, and she had been drinking a lot of coffee to get through finals that were coming up, all of which led to even worse headaches than usual. On the drive home, she lit a cigarette, as the methodic inhale-exhale would sometimes soothe the pain in her head. She was a few miles from home and barely thinking about driving, instead her mind was on work, school, her best friend Carrie's recent break-up with that cheating bastard, her parents' upcoming anniversary, and the importance of not ashing all over herself while driving. As she drove through a familiar intersection, one with a forever-long green light for her direction, she didn't even notice the truck speeding through his red light and coming straight at her driver's-side door.

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When Angela awoke, her first thought was 'I need a cigarette.' Her next thought was 'Where the Hell am I?'

The doctors answered her question, in fact, they answered all of her questions. She was in the hospital. No, she was not badly hurt from the accident. No, the driver had not been drunk or stoned or asleep, he'd simply been in a rush and knew how long that light would take. She had no broken bones or internal bleeding, and in other circumstances would be on her way home.

"What do you mean other circumstances?" she asked, wanting a cigarette more than anything.

The doctors tried to convince Angela to wait until her parents or friends could be contacted, as they were spread throughout the hospital in the waiting room and cafeteria, but Angela did not like the reluctant look on their faces.

When her parents did arrive in the room, red and puffy eyed and trembling, Angela wished they hadn't come. When the doctors finally delivered the terrible news, Angela felt almost worse for her parents than she did for herself.

While doing the standard tests after such an accident, the doctors had found something a little odd going on in her head.

A tumor, a large one. In her brain. It had been the reason for the headaches. Even if they had caught it earlier, there was only a 10% chance of them having been able to remove it. It just wouldn't have been such a horrible shock now. The tumor had grown and was beginning to affect her brain, explaining why she'd been having memory, sensory, and motor problems in the last few weeks something she'd attributed to stress and a lack of sleep. In less than a week, she would lose most of her motor ability. In two weeks, she wouldn't be able to talk anymore. In a month, if she was lucky enough to survive that long, her brain would be complete mush. And these were generous figures. There was a possibility she wouldn't even last the week.

Angela asked the question she could only imagine her parents were thinking.

"Does this have anything to do with my smoking?"

Using a lot of medical terms Angela didn't understand, the doctors told her that no, it had nothing to do with smoking. It was probably genetic. That, Angela did understand.

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A few days later, knowing that she had perhaps a month to live, Angela insisted on being discharged from the hospital. She would not die in a stale, white room surrounded by people she didn't know. And she would not have the last days of her life filled with pity and concern.

A week after being discharged from the hospital, Angela couldn't stand it anymore. She could barely remember silly things like what she'd had for dinner or her favorite character on her soap opera. Her legs were no longer responding to what she told them to do all the time, and she was using either a walker or a wheelchair to go anywhere. The headaches were killing her, '*ha*,' she thought, '*literally!*' and she still only knew one thing that made them feel a bit better, though she hadn't been able to indulge since she refused to smoke in front of her parents and they never left her side. So she and her best friend went out to her favorite coffee shop.

Carrie rolled her to a table outside, under an umbrella. She tucked Angela's blanket tightly around her legs and went inside to get their drinks. When she came back outside with Angela's latte, she found her crying, slightly, and holding a cigarette to her lips with one hand, while the other hung limply in her lap, holding a lighter.

Carrie, the concerned best friend, asked what was wrong, and Angela explained that she couldn't get her left arm to raise the lighter to her cigarette, and even if she could, she couldn't maneuver her hand and thumb around the darn thing to light. Carrie held up her own lighter and lit Angela's cigarette, then went back inside to grab her own drink.

A woman, bringing her own non-fat, de-caf, no-foam latte out of the café and taking a seat a few tables down from Angela, glared at the smoking girl.

"Those things will kill you, you know."

"No," Angela said, "no, they won't."