

Kayla's Lungs, Part 4

Written by

Friday, 31 August 2012 15:44 - Last Updated Friday, 31 August 2012 15:57

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by **Vesperae**

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January 8, early afternoon

I can't believe what I've been through since last night. I can't believe what I'm going through. I can't believe what's happened. I can't believe what I've done.

When I called Kayla yesterday, she picked up after only two rings. *"Hey...I'm SO glad you called me...are you OK...?"*

Her quiet, deeply concerned voice felt like velvet swirling in my ear, but it sent a sharp chill down my spine.

"...I don't know how I could have been so inconsiderate last night."

Still in a stunned daze, I was startled to hear myself speak. *"I'm sorry I ran off so suddenly."*

"What happened? Did my smoking make you sick? I should have never lit up in my little car like that since you don't smoke..."

I was even more startled to hear myself say *"Could we get together at your place and talk?"*

"Sure Sweetie, I've just got a few things to do before you come over; how about seven-ish?"

I was both thankful and amazed that she didn't say anything about busting me for my obvious interest in her smoking.

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After we both hung up, I sat on the couch staring at my phone in my hand, the dizzying sensation of free-fall continuing to paralyzing me. An image popped into my head as I sat there wide-eyed and semi-catatonic, an image of the Virginia Slims lung scan technician from my dreams. I pictured her standing across the room from me in her white lab coat, with a freshly lit Virginia Slims 120 dangling from her red lips and a gun in her right hand pointed directly at my chest. She pulled the trigger, and I imagined the bullet moving towards me at an impossibly slow speed, so slow that it would be easy for me to just stand up and get out of the way. But I was completely fascinated to watch it move ever closer, ever closer, ever closer...and I couldn't move...until it was just about to penetrate the flesh covering my rib cage, and I snapped out of my daydream.

I stood up quickly, and began moving towards the kitchen for another cup of tea. But everything seemed to happen as if I was somehow just observing myself rather than making it happen.

Gravity. I was helpless against it, and I knew it, so I began an internal count down to seven-ish, and slowly integrated the acceptance of where this was all headed one micro-second at a time.

By the time I had gotten dressed and was heading out to my car, I was feeling sufficiently together and focused to concentrate on driving.

I drove around a little first, instinctively retracing my walking route from the night before, including the grocery store where Kayla bought her fresh carton of Virginia Slims 120s, the spot where I jumped out, and the places I walked, including the bus stop with the anti-smoking poster and the convenience store I went to. I decided to pull into the convenience store parking lot for no particular reason and found a spot where I could see the front counter.

Sure enough, the same clerk that I saw last night was working, and I watched her walk out from behind the counter as she slipped into her pink down ski jacket and stepped out in front of the store. She reached into a pocket and I couldn't believe my eyes. She produced a pack of Virginia Slims Menthol 120s – just as I had dreamt she smoked – SPOOK-Y! She quickly lit up and I watched her take a long first drag, and inhale it so deeply that I could see her chest expand through her jacket. The night was so cold that her exhale looked absolutely massive,

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and just as she began to push the smoke out through her smiling, satisfied lips from deep in her chest, an old pickup truck's engine cranked to life in the parking space next to her, and belched out a plume of toxic exhaust that mimicked hers. I watched her take massive drag after massive drag, one right after the other, until her extra long cigarette was gone and deposited throughout her respiratory tract. As I watched her crush out the butt on the sidewalk and walk back into the store, all I could think was that she just spent the last five minutes taking an intensely concentrated air pollution break. But she obviously really enjoyed it!

My phone chirped a new text from Kayla: *"I'm ready whenever you are! See you soon! – K."*

The sharp chill shot down my spine again. This was it. It was going to happen, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

A few minutes later, Kayla opened the door to her apartment with a big warm smile, took me gently by the hand, and led me to the living room where she had a couple dozen candles burning and a bottle of wine chilling on the coffee table with two empty glasses. No ashtray, no sign of her cigarettes or a lighter, and she'd obviously aired out her apartment and hadn't been smoking inside recently. There was only a hint of stale smoke, although it was almost totally masked by the fragrance of the lilac candles that cast a warm glow throughout the space. She had the [Twin Peaks Soundtrack](#) playing softly in the background, an album she played the first night we got together that I found darkly beautiful and relaxing.

She took my jacket and sat me down on the couch, poured me a glass of wine, and then poured one for herself. A lock of her long dark hair swished past my face, and for a second I caught a whiff of Virginia Slims tar mixed with Pantene and Estée Lauder, and I thought to myself that she'd probably smoked a cigarette on her balcony just before I came over, at about the same time that the convenience store clerk was taking her intensely concentrated air pollution break.

Kayla was wearing black yoga pants and a sheer pastel pink tank over a black lace bra. And as she settled in her usual chair across from me, the shape of her bra cups made me think of her lungs...Virginia Slims lungs getting blacker with every cigarette, just beneath a thin gauze of flesh that hides what every deeply inhaled drag is doing to them.

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We both took a sip of wine – mine much larger than hers – and she smiled and said *"So why the sudden exit last night?"*

I blushed, took another big sip of wine, and looked away from her in shame, the sensation of falling beginning to paralyze me again.

"C'mon...we've been friends for a long time. You can talk to me about anything, Baby."

I took a long cleansing breath deep into my healthy non-smoker's lungs and let it out slowly. There was no use in denying why I was there, sitting on her couch, drinking her Pinot Grigio, listening to her music...thinking about her lungs...thinking about my lungs. My eyes settled on the flame of one of the candles burning on the coffee table, and without really intending to speak, I said softly but evenly *"You were right...I guess that I am a little curious about smoking, but I was completely surprised by it, and it freaked me out."* "A little curious" – now there was a massive understatement!

"That's what I thought...and it's OK, I completely understand. I went through something similar myself before I tried smoking." I looked at her, hungry for her to continue to speak. Kayla smiled and nodded sympathetically. *"I'm just so sorry that I teased you about it like I did last night...I don't know what got into me, and I feel awful about that."*

I took another big sip of wine. I was starting to get a buzz, because after the vivid nightmares I'd had the night before, I'd slept very little, and I hadn't eaten anything all day. I managed a smile, blushed again, and said *"It's OK...I...overreacted. I'm sorry...that I ran off like that."*

Kayla smiled tenderly and studied my face for a second before reaching out for the wine bottle to top off both our glasses, even though mine was mostly gone and hers was still almost full. *"When we were in high school, neither one of us would have been caught dead hanging out with 'The Smokers,' or at least that's how I used to think. I always thought that smoking was just plain dumb, and I never imagined myself with a cigarette, or understood why anyone would want to smoke. Our whole lives we've had the message drilled into our heads over and over and over again that 'smoking is bad, bad, bad,' and we've been so brainwashed and programmed to be against smoking that the thought of doing it became...forbidden...a sort of*

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Taboo...at least for me...and maybe for you too?"

Entranced by her voice, again swirling like velvet in my ears, I nodded "yes."

"Of course...especially for you...the runner and honors biology student..."

I felt naked, but strangely grateful for her perceptiveness. *"For me, I'd never realized how big the Taboo was, or how deep it went, until I saw you smoking for the first time a few days ago. It was always there, but I'd never really thought about until now..."*

Kayla leaned forward, and the warm glow of the candles painted the pale flesh of her chest beneath her sheer top in even starker contrast to the blackness of her bra, and the light caught all of the little voids in the lace, which made me think of her alveoli drowning in tar.

"For me, it was my academic advisor for my degree program. She's only been out of grad school for a few years, and she's young, energetic, fun, fashion forward, very smart, and very cool. It was impossible for me not to put her on a bit of a pedestal, because she seemed like everything that I wanted to be. I was taking one of her introductory survey courses, which I loved, and I was going to her office to have our first academic planning meeting a few weeks after I'd started at the university last fall. As I approached the building where she has her office, I spotted her outside one of the entrances, and as I got closer, I saw that she was smoking a cigarette! I'd never seen her smoke before, and had absolutely no idea that she smoked. I was early for my appointment, and decided to take a seat on a bench a good distance from where she was standing. She seemed to not have seen me yet, and I got out a book and pretended to read as I watched her texting on her phone with one hand while hungrily devouring her cigarette with the other. I was shocked...my first college role model was someone who enthusiastically did something that seemed to totally contradict my image of her. And for the first time in my life, I started to actually think about smoking beyond all of the anti-smoking programming, because she was about as far as possible from the negative image of smokers that I'd had beaten into my head all my life."

I thought again of Kayla as she used to be in high school, and pictured *that girl* sitting there absorbing the sight of her first real college role model deliberately using her lungs to absorb tar and nicotine and carbon monoxide, deliberately using her lungs to absorb Taboo.

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The wine was starting to take the edge off of my anxiety, and I was beginning to relax a bit for the first time in several days. *"So what happened?"*

"She was every bit as delightful and impressive one on one as she had been in class, and we hit it off immediately. I of course said nothing about her smoking, and did my best to put it out of my mind during our meeting, but thought about it constantly afterwards. Within a few days, curiosity got the better of me, and I ended up here in my apartment one night with my very first pack of cigarettes and lighter, and..." Kayla laughed and playfully rolled her eyes.

"And just like that, you started smoking?"

Kayla laughed again. *"Hardly 'just like that'...the first few cigarettes I tried tasted horrible, and I coughed so hard that I thought I was going to die. I even puked a couple of times!"*

"So why did you keep doing it?!"

"I guess that part of me just fell in love with the idea that I was doing this forbidden thing – this tiny little, but really big, bad thing. It felt amazing to symbolically flip off all of the authoritative anti-smoking programming that I'd been fed. And I also really wanted to understand what it was like for my advisor when she smoked. I had the image stuck in my head of her standing outside that first day that I saw her smoking, and all of the pleasure that she seem to get from doing it, and I needed to know what that was like."

I thought about our respiratory system's innate self-protection mechanisms, and how in order to be able to inhale cigarette smoke, which is the very last thing that our lungs are designed to do, you have to force those self-protection mechanisms into submission. You have to willfully destroy them. *"How long did it take you to get used to inhaling cigarette smoke?"*

"By about my seventh cigarette, and a few days after I tried my first one, I was able to inhale small to moderate size drags for most of the cigarette, and I got a wicked head rush that I really

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got off on." Kayla smiled and added, *"But those were only 100s, not the 120s that I smoke now. They were Virginia Slims Gold Pack 100s, which I chose because they're what my advisor smokes. I saw the pack in her purse sitting on a side table in her office when I walked in."*

Kayla stood up, cocked her head to the side, narrowed her eyes, put her hands on her hips, and gave me a wry smile. *"Do you mind if I smoke? All this talk of smoking has me just dying for a cigarette..."* She winked as she said the word "dying" and giggled.

I blushed and smiled and said quietly *"Of course not..."*

She sashayed out of the living room and into the kitchen, and sashayed back seconds later with her pack of Virginia Slims 120s and her black Bic lighter in one hand, and her big glass ashtray in the other, and set them down on the coffee table in front of me. My heart started to race as she retrieved her glass of wine and moved to sit down on the couch next to me. From someplace deep inside me, I could hear the distant echos of a screaming voice proclaiming "I DON'T SMOKE!" There was the chill down my spine again.

Kayla positioned herself on the cushion next to me so that she could face me, and I turned to look at her, my pulse throbbing rapidly now.

"A few cigarettes later, by about my my tenth cigarette, I was able to inhale regular, moderate size drags for all of the length of a Virginia Slims Gold Pack 100 without coughing, and I was amazed at how good it felt to really inhale cigarette smoke once I'd made my body be able to do it. I got my first glimmer of just how enjoyable cigarette smoking can be, and why so many people continue to do it. And by the end of my first pack, it was perfectly clear, and it just seems to get more and more pleasurable the more I smoke."

She looked at me, and saw that I was suddenly a little panicked. *"Hey, just relax. If you get uncomfortable at any time, just let me know, OK?"*

I took another healthy sip of wine and managed to get out "OK."

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Kayla touched my shoulder with a gentle, reassuring caress and looked into my eyes with an equally gentle and reassuring smile. *"Here's what I'd like to do. I'd like to smoke a cigarette now close to you, and I'd like for you to watch me do it. I'd also like to give you a little advice about trying smoking, that is if you decide you want to try it. Would that be OK?"*

For the first time since we'd been reunited, I was going to get to watch her smoke, and do it without any need for reservation or pretense. Kayla wanted me to watch her take great pleasure in deliberately destroying her lungs, with the goal of possibly helping me to take great pleasure in deliberately destroying mine. Wide-eyed and starting to enjoy the thought that I can now overcome, or at least control, my fear, I nodded "yes."

"OK then..." Kayla reached out for her pack, extracted one of her deadly extra-length cancer sticks, grabbed her lighter, and looked into my eyes again. *"The basic action of smoking is simple, as I'm sure you realize, but there is infinite subtle variation in how you can do it. When you take a drag, you draw smoke from the cigarette by sealing your lips around the filter end and creating suction to fill your mouth with smoke, just like you're sipping a thick milkshake through a straw. Then you remove the cigarette from your lips and open your mouth and inhale the smoke into your lungs, hold it for a second or two, and then exhale. But first you obviously have to light up..."*

She continued to make eye contact with me as she placed the Virginia Slims 120 in the middle of her pouting dark pink lips and sparked her lighter to life, only looking away for a second to bring the flame to the tip, which began to glow bright orange as her cheeks caved in and she burned the first quarter inch or so of her cigarette down. She plucked the now lipstick-stained filter from her lips and parted them widely to reveal a thick white mass of smoke swirling inside her mouth, which suddenly disappeared down her throat and deep into her thoroughly smoke habituated lungs with an audible "whoosh" as her chest expanded and her black lace cradled breasts heaved out and up. She held up the glamorous instrument of her self-destruction next to her face, and after holding the toxins deep inside her body, turned to the side to exhale an enormous plume of smoke through pursed lips away from my face. The acrid stench of burning Taboo began to overtake the lilac fragrance in the room.

An enormous placid smile came over her face. *"Ohhhhh...sooo goood. Like lingerie for my lungs."*

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Sitting that close to her, I could see that she was still exhaling little jets of smoke from her nose and mouth as she spoke, and over the course of several regular breathing cycles after that. Her filthy little lungs were *still* saturated with cigarette smoke, even after all that she had exhaled!

"Of course, when you're first trying smoking, that would be waaay too big a drag, and waaay too deep an inhale – I just really needed that. For your first couple of cigarettes, I'd suggest taking small drags, and not even inhaling at all, like this." She took a tiny, quick fraction of her first drag, kept her lips sealed for a second after removing the cigarette, and then pursed her lips and quickly blew the smoke out. "

Doing this will help you to become accustomed to the taste of cigarette smoke, which is definitely an acquired taste."

"After your first couple of cigarettes, I'd suggest continuing to take small drags for your next few, but every few drags take a really small one and then breathe in sharply like you've just been startled, and then let it out slowly, like this." She took the same very short drag that she'd just demonstrated, and then opened her mouth and breathed in suddenly like she did when she lit up, although this time a fraction of the smoke that she originally exhaled came streaming from her pursed lips.

"You'll almost certainly cough the first few times you inhale, but it helps a lot if you've got something soothing to drink, especially something alcoholic, and if you make a conscious mental effort not to cough. Think of it as a 'mind over body' exercise. And if you overdo it, you'll also probably get sick to your stomach, so just take it easy, and put the cigarette out immediately if you do start to cough a lot or if you feel sick. Don't rush it, and don't try smoking more than one or two cigarettes per day for your first pack. But once you've got the hang of inhaling small drags, with each subsequent cigarette, gradually take progressively larger drags, and inhale them more frequently." Kayla took a slightly larger drag than she had before, again breathed in sharply, and then slowly exhaled a slightly larger and more opaque plume of smoke than before.

"If you make it that far, you'll be on the verge of understanding that there is no other sensual pleasure quite like cigarette smoking..." And with that, she hollowed her cheeks and took an even harder and longer drag than when she lit up, again opened her mouth to show me the dense swirling load of carcinogens and poisons waiting to corrupt and lay waste to her fragile body, and then sent it deep down to the depths of her alveoli where it could do her the most possible damage. After her ribcage expanded, her chest grew still for several long seconds as she held the toxic vapor inside her, and then she threw her head back as if she was in a state

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of rapture, and slowly let the massive plum of concentrated air pollution rise from the depths of her tainted shrinking lungs into the air above like a human smokestack.

"I feels so...obscene...to inhale cigarette smoke...like dirty vapor sex. And once you condition your body to be able to inhale, you will have not only acquired an appreciation of the unique taste of cigarette smoke, but the taste will also change and get better and better the more you do it."

I thought about the adaptive nature of our physiology and senses, and realized that the more tar you deposit in your mouth and nasal passages, the more desensitized you'd likely become to all of the noxious chemicals in cigarette smoke.

"I'd like to try something now, if you're OK with it...I'd like to take some medium sized drags and inhale them, but this time I'd like to exhale them into your face, and I'd like you to open your mouth and breathe in gently, and just a little bit, when the smoke washes over you."

Just like my dream about the Virginia Slims lung scan technician interviewing me in the conference room, only with actual consequences.

"For me, it'll be like drinking a strong cup of tea made with a fresh tea bag, and for you, it'll be like drinking a weak cup of tea made with a used tea bag. Do you want to try it?"

I reached out for my glass and emptied it, and Kayla refilled it. The haze and smoke drifts surrounding us glowed in the candlelight, and I felt like I was in a dream, only this time not completely overwhelmed by fear, and relishing the excitement of satisfying my curiosity. "OK."

Our eyes met, and she cycled another hit of danger through the dark, terrifying secrets within her lungs, and smiled as she pursed her painted lips and exhaled, her face almost vanishing behind the cloud of toxins that she offered me. "Don't cough" I thought to myself. The acrid smoke stung my eyes and I closed them. I parted my lips slightly, and deliberately breathed in a little just as the densest part of Kayla's poisonous breath engulfed my face. I opened my eyes, held my breath for a second, and then slowly and forcefully exhaled. As I did, I could feel

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something in my trachea...a burning sensation...and I couldn't believe what I saw next. A tiny little puff of smoke came out of my mouth...and I didn't cough!

"Very good!" Kayla cooed. "Do you want to try it again?"

"Yes!" I couldn't believe how enthusiastic I sounded.

We repeated this three more times. Each time, I took a slightly deeper breath and exhaled a small, but slightly larger, amount of smoke. And each time I did, Kayla seemed to take greater satisfaction in my progress.

But on my fifth attempt, I became overly confident and inhaled too deeply; my lungs seized, and I began to cough violently. Kayla lifted her smoldering cancer stick up and away from me, directed the remainder of her residual exhales toward the ceiling, and began gently patting and rubbing my back as I bent over the edge of the couch hacking. *"That's OK...it just takes a little time, Baby."*

Kayla took one last long drag on her cigarette down to the filter and stubbed it out, and let the dirtiest and most virulent part of it soak into her respiratory epithelium without deliberately exhaling. She sat back, watching me recover, slowly and repeatedly breathing out the little bit of smoke that her lungs didn't absorb in cascading tendrils through her nose. We looked at each other and smiled, and shared a moment of silence together as the ethereal voice of Julee Cruise singing "Falling" wafted through the space like Kayla's lingering Virginia Slims smoke.

Kayla sighed, leaned forward and caressed my shoulder again reassuringly, and said, *"I think that you've probably had enough of an adventure for one night. Why don't you go home, think about what I said, and decide what you want to do. Just hang on a sec, OK Sweetie?"*

She got up, headed back to the kitchen, and returned with a gift bag, which she handed to me. Inside the bag was a bottle of Pinot Grigio, a corkscrew, a pack of her Virginia Slims 120s, a new black Bic lighter, and a new glass ashtray.

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"Something tells me that if you do decide to give smoking a serious try, that you'd probably be most comfortable doing it on your own...yes?"

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