

Zachary Gilliam

Dr. Christine Munoz

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Whispers Before The Storm

Hi, I'm Luna. I'm twenty-three years old, somewhere between being young and taking on adult responsibilities, finishing my master's in health informatics. Early last year, I was running at full speed. The summer was a mix of long days and short nights, stretched thin between my internship at a brain-computer interface company, two accelerated summer courses, and a bunch of research projects. My life felt like a puzzle dumped across a table with every piece demanding to be fitted in place.

By August, the frantic motion slowed. My internship wrapped up, my courses reached their end, and suddenly there was quiet, a silence that pressed against my skin. I would wake up tense and then quickly feel my body relax, but beneath this there was a small ache. A whisper from my body, almost dismissible. The pain had a faint resemblance of period cramps, ten percent of what I was used to. It was so weak that I laughed at myself for noticing. I ignored it easily, tucking it away like a receipt in a drawer. I had my life back again. I took bike rides and had coffees with friends, I cooked large meals I didn't have time for. Everything that the summer was missing. I only noticed the ache when I woke up. During the day, it was so subtle it was sort of like the background hum of a refrigerator, you don't notice until it's gone, or until it grows louder.

Then September came, and with it, the semester. Life quickened again. I was running on synthetic energy, running between classes, running my lab, and running to my part-time shifts. The ache stayed, creeping forward slowly and too gradual to sound alarm. Until one Friday.

"You look pale," a coworker said.

"Just tired," I lied. "Long day."

A twelve-hour shift packed with meetings with people much smarter than me but also more boring. Time dripped like paint dries. I was struggling to stay awake, I almost felt dizzy. Until the ache erupted. It was no longer a whisper but a scream, like a gun shot me from the inside. The pain seized me so sharply I fell to my knees, but I clenched my jaw, stood up, and white-knuckled through the last hour, refusing to yield. When the shift ended, I ran out to meet my boyfriend's car. I slid into the seat and whispered, "Something's wrong."

As we entered the ER, the lights were cold. They were buzzing above us like a bee hive, almost angrily. Nurses moved like professional dancers, guiding me through hallways that smelled faintly of antiseptic and something metallic. After taking vitals, meeting with the doctor for him to order an x-ray, the doctor finally stood before me again, his face grave yet softened at the edges, he told me words that cracked my world open... "It's an ectopic pregnancy," he said. "I'm so sorry.... That means a fertilized egg had implanted in my fallopian tube instead of my uterus. As it grew, it caused the tube to stretch and finally rupture, spilling blood into my abdomen. My body had been a battlefield and I hadn't known. He said it was a miracle I was still awake after pushing through hours of pain, finishing

my shift as if endurance could stitch me back together. I felt embarrassed when he told me this, like “am I an idiot for not listening to my body,” or, “does he think I’m stupid?”

But after hearing those words, my focus shifted to the doctor who said them. This doctor was very considerate for a man working in gynecology, never entered the room without a woman at his side. A silent gesture that made me feel less like a subject and more like a person. The nurses wrapped me in warm blankets, tucked hydration into my veins (I’m not scared of needles), and politely asked their questions. Their kindness was wrapping around me like a plush blanket. And then came surgery. Darkness swallowed me in an instant. When I woke, I was in a room meant for beginnings, not losses... a room in the mother-baby unit painted like a kid’s birthday party. I lay in a bed made for new mothers, soft and welcoming, yet depressing in its irony. I was caged within cartoon paintings of zebras and monkeys, tigers and pandas, baseball bats and candy, all things meant for new mothers and their newborns. But not me. My boyfriend sat by my side, his hand stuck to mine, his eyes swollen with fatigue and fear. In that moment, his presence was a buoy in stormwater, the only thing keeping me afloat.

Recovery was long and difficult. My body ached, stitched and weak. I was bedridden for weeks, the walls of my room shrinking closer each day, my eyes were glued to my phone. Productivity, once my compass, gone. My research sat untouched, my ambitions paused. My relationship strained under the weight of my condition, but without him, I would have drowned .

“You don’t understand,” I snapped one night.

“I’m trying,” he said. “I just don’t know how to help you.”

The slow return of my strength felt more like learning to live in ruins or planting flowers in dry soil.

Now, I realize the body is not a machine you can will past its breaking point. It speaks in whispers before it screams. When I think back on that summer I hear those whispers. And I can’t help but wonder what might have been if I had listened sooner.