I saw the flare before I felt the burn.

I was a face in the crowd—breathing the same air, but miles away in meaning. It was like craving ice cream in winter, like poking at the hornet’s nest without safety. Before I knew it, the virus had already begun its journey for my heart.

The fever waited. Patient. Quiet for five moons.

Winter passed, working against the virus’s chokehold, and I thought I was spared until I found myself in the same room again. It started with a cough of curiosity. A passing glance, an almost-thought.

I told myself it was nothing—just a tickle in my chest. Just a name that lingered a bit too long after roll call. I told myself it was nothing. We were strangers, no reason to look twice. Yet I did. Just admiration. Just a flicker.

But my heart was already compromised. My proximity was too close to the source. And this time, I inhaled something I couldn’t exhale.

That night, I lay awake, my head swirling with new chemicals. My lungs starved for breath, my limbs useless—spilling wine all over the bed. I didn’t even flinch. Just lay there, in the maroon of my new illness, soaking through my clothes, sinking into my skin.

I ran to my doctors for some relief, but their diagnoses were cruel and unforgiving. I return with a prescription and a note that said, “Condition may be incurable. Victim seems scared.”

Every morning hence began with me burning in a quiet, helpless plea.

I cough his name throughout the day. I bleed in my diaries every night. My heart rate skyrockets with every buzz of my phone. The blush of my cheeks, the sweat of my palms, and the burn of my skin are palpable when the sun goes down.

My skin knew his name before my mouth ever spoke it.

Time began to blur: Mornings bled into afternoons, and nights came too late, too loud, too long. My focus shattered. I read the same sentence five times and still couldn’t grasp the meaning. I’d stare at nothing for minutes, caught in a trance I couldn’t snap out of.

I lost count of days. Missed appointments. Forgot names.

Emotionally, I was a flickering bulb—bright, dim, erratic. I laughed too loud, cried too softly, felt too much and then not at all. Some days I walked like a ghost, others like I was on fire. I began imagining things—memories that never happened, sounds that weren’t real, glimpses of something familiar in strangers' faces.

Illness is easiest to conceal when you know how to act. I brushed my hair, painted on calm, wore my brightest lip color. I moved through the world as a functioning body while losing my mind in dark corners. No one could tell. Not even me, sometimes.

I laughed at my own unraveling. Romanticized it. Pretended it was poetry. Pretended it was fine.

But it wasn’t. It was the kind of pain I didn’t want to heal from—a scab I kept picking just to feel something. A burn in my stomach when he laughed. A sting in my heart when he forgot to look.

It was all over me. He was all over me. No amount of rain could wash him off. This sickness wrapped itself around my spine, dragged me deeper until I was too delirious, too far from the cure.

I thought I could manage it, contain it, outgrow it like a passing cold. But it lingered. Settled into my bloodstream. The withdrawal was worse than the high—I fought not to reach for the needle of his name again, then sighed.

I wore it like perfume—every day, every hour—sweet enough to mask the ache but never strong enough to hide it. Because it wasn’t about getting better. It was about *staying* sick.

I hid it in plain sight, tucked between text threads and unsent messages, in search histories and draft folders. All over my devices. All over me.

The sickness is still here after months. It no longer burns; it hums. There’s no prescription for this. No name for it either. Just a quiet knowing that something inside me moved—and I won’t be the same again until the fever is cured.

*God, I’m so lovesick.*