

Dear Stranger

Dear stranger,

Here are the answers to your questions
even if you are afraid to ask...

No, I am not contagious.

You do not need to move away from me. Glaring harder will not cure my cough.

This is a nebulizer. I am not vaping.
And no, I do not have a lighter.

Yes, I actually am very sick. The words "lazy" and "complainer" do not apply to me.

If I need help,
I'll ask.
Please do not treat me like a child.
I'd rather have your respect.

My name is not Cystic Fibrosis.

I'm sorry to hear that you needed an inhaler when you were a kid.
But you do not know what my life is like.

Just because you feel sorry for me
does not mean I am an "inspiration."

Yes, I am aware there are silver linings
to everything.
You don't need to save me, I'm already one step ahead of you.

Sometimes I am sad about my disease,
but I am not sad now.
Those feelings are not for you.

I do not think your thoughts make you a bad person.
We all have room to grow
and I'm glad I could help you.
Thank you for the smile.

Now it is my turn to ask questions, dear stranger.

We are different
and exactly the same
in limitless ways.

Can you count
more than 65?

Telling stories about roses
without the thorns
only feels like plastic.

How well do I fit your stereotype of a
good
sick person?

Advancing our cause
to be stronger
requires
challenging
ourselves
and others.

Including you.
Am I making you uncomfortable yet?

Resistance is not incompatible
with gratitude.
This is what strength in adversity looks like.
Hope
in pursuit of equality.

Are you with me, dear stranger?

I live for more than survival...

Freedom.

Love.

Respect.

My disease is not in command of my identity
and neither are you.

What principles do you live by?

I am sick. I am strong.

And I am

just

like

you.

Do you recognize me now?

Are we really strangers?