I watched the rain from the hospital window – glass droplets hatching into tiny silver minnows – streaking against the sky – listening to the soft pitter-patter of the rain. In my hand, a research paper and a small bunch of garden flowers, their bitter sweetness quietly blotting out the artificial sterility of the room.

I walk to Nate’s bedside. Nate nods, and I readjust the pillows supporting his head, gently tugging the white linen blankets over his chest, the tubes and wires that connected to his lungs.

I began to show him the paper, medical research he had been working on, various cancers and their relations to obesity. I had already read the entire paper, but I knew how much it meant to Nate.

I had known Nate for many years. He was my research mentor, the teacher that had been the guiding hand for my aspirations – a sage.

And reading the paper, it couldn’t have been clearer why Nate was who he was: boundless knowledge and wisdom, but also an unparalleled wit and street-smarts.

It had been three months since he had been admitted to the hospital’s internal care unit.

His body had become so light, so frail, his strength slowly consumed by a nameless and ceaseless illness. But, against the constant shuffling of doctors and nurses, the whirring of machines and medical systems, I still wanted to hope.

We called it Berger’s disease, and him, patient zero, that doctors would miraculously engineer a cure. That we could all celebrate his birthday in July.

I would visit Nate in the hospital every day. And each and every time, I would always bring something special with me.

Often, it was something that we were both equally fond of, and that particular something was food. I knew there was more than plenty of food in the hospital – churned out by the ring of a bell – but I still wanted to help, to give the warmth of a home-cooked meal. But, above all, I wanted to bring “food-for-thought”, something to talk over.

I remember picking the tender shoots of asparagus before the blossomed into swaying feathery stalks, the sizzle of silky tofu on the pan, and the smell of soy sauce and shrimp being sauteed together. Or sometimes, a dish from Siam Café, Nate’s go-to place.

Every time I would bring something, Nate would always light up

“Ah, so much food!” he sang. “Well, now you have to eat it with me”

And over the food, we would just talk, Nate asking how school was going, teachers, friends, math, history, writing, art. We would talk about stories, i.e. about how Nate and Suzy one time cooked up a storm of almost biblical proportion, prepping hundreds of pounds of chickens and beef, - and untold more of vegetables, carrots, and potatoes – feeding the entire Cancer Research Department by themselves.

Nate was larger than life – both literally and figuratively.

A man who could simultaneously pass off as Santa Claus, with his puffy white beard (and once-round figure) – and the Godfather, who had carried the entire school’s medical department on his shoulders for decades, tirelessly working to mentor and teach the future generation.

I look back at the window. The rain had already begun to clear, the sun trickling into soft pools of light. By the window - tree lilacs the color of lavender, orange peonies the size of summer peaches, pastel irises with golden veins.

It was the last time I would see Nate. He had finished the paper, and it was about time that they had to administer medications.

I said goodbye, hugging him tightly, and smiled, closing my eyes.

“Tomorrow?”

Ok, then

“Ok, then”

Nate had passed away. It was a June day, not a cloud in the sky.

I do not remember how he looked, how his body had faded away. I only remember his soul, how he had never given up what he loved.

It was his final lesson - one he nurtured his entire life.

To care for others, to love and to respect, and to hope.

And I was his final student.