It was the last time I would see Nate.

I never said goodbye.

Watching the sky from the hospital window, glass droplets of cerulean rain hatching into tiny silver minnows – streaking against the billowing clouds.

In my hands, a research paper I was working on and a small bunch of meadow-flowers, their bitter sweetness blotting out the artificial sterility of the room. The lulling pitter-patter of the rain a gentle respite from the static whirring.

Nate had fallen into a coma.

Two days ago, he had been rushed into the ICU. Sepsis. His organs were beginning to fail, mechanical tubes and wires ceaselessly pumping medication and scarlet blood, his body covered in white linen.

I could not speak. I could not say goodbye.

I placed the flowers quietly on the window-sill.

Nate had been my mentor for the past four years; a man larger than life - literally and figuratively. No one else could simultaneously pass off as Santa Claus, with his puffy white beard and once-round figure; and the “Godfather” - Dr. Nate A. Berger, the former dean of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine - eyes that could pierce straight through you.

But seeing him in the hospital, his body fragile but heavy, slowly heaving up and down from the ventilator support. He was fading away.

Afraid that he had become so frail, the rising wind would someday carry him into the blue sky, far away.

I knew he was dying.

I remembered the paper, sitting by the flowers.

I dreamed of Nate reading one last time. Seeing his eyes light up, his expressions illuminating into a familiar soft smile. He was the guiding hand that anchored my ambition, the teacher that always believed there was no height too high, no dream too big. The definition of a sage, a man of boundless knowledge, wisdom, and strength.

I had dreamed that he would live forever.

It was May when his health began to decline. He had fallen. Arriving at the hospital, he had to wait 8 hours in the emergency room before being given a bed. And despite needing acute medical intervention, he was suddenly discharged after only 2 days.

In the search for rehabilitative care, all he was given were statements “We are not interested”.

Returning home, he required 24-hour care, costing tens-of-thousands a month. However, his health had deteriorated to a critical state.

He never woke up.

I remembered lugging bags bursting with food.

We were both always foodies.

Every New-Years, Nate would invite everybody he knew to his home. Eating, talking, smiling - a vibrant constellation of hundreds of people from all walks-of-life, united by steaming dishes and the buttery aroma of baking pastries.

Nate smiles, tired but still glowing.

“So, Bill, what did you bring today?”

Every time we would talk, I would always cook something. Picking tender shoots of asparagus before they bloomed into feathery-stalks, walnut-colored shitake mushrooms budding from oakwood.

“Ah, so much food!” Nate would sing. “Well, now you have to eat it with me.”

And we did.

Eating, talking, smiling. Remembering the summers tirelessly working together on research, the opportunity encompassed in the field of medicine.

After some time, the rain outside had begun to wane, trickling into soft pools of warm light, the sun-colored dandelions by the window quietly blossoming.

I remember embracing him, closing my eyes. He had become so light.

Nate passed away. It was June 15, 2024. Not a cloud in the sky.

I was his last student.

His story was one of countless.

Having witnessed how much Nate’s health had declined, denied critical medical care, the burden shouldered by his family – has illuminated the innate flaw underlying our nation’s health policy.

The annual expenditure on healthcare amounts of 17% of GDP alone. However, the fatality-rate for sepsis in elderly patients is 50-60%, a statistic significantly higher than any other high-income country.

Countless patients are systematically denied care by health-ins

It has become a system sanctioned only by determinants of profit.

But we can still make a change. A future guided by efficient, effective, and ethical policy.

Life is short. But I learn now how precious it truly is.

To live is to be compassionate, empathic and kind. And to make a change, one must first learn to care and to understand.

This was the final lesson Nate had taught me.

In the sky, a single dandelion, rising in the summer wind

I never said goodbye.

Because the teaching goes on.