­It was the last time I would see my mentor.

I never said goodbye.

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

In my hands, a research paper I had been working on and a small bunch of wild flowers, their bitter sweetness blotting out the artificial sterility of the room; the quiet pitter patter of the rain a respite from the mechanical whirring.

It had been three months since Nate had fallen ill.

He 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 - the former dean of Case Western Reserve University - eyes that could pierce straight through you.

But seeing him in the hospital, how he had weakened so much - his vitality inevitably deteriorating, consumed by an unknown illness. Afraid, that he had become so ceaselessly frail, the rising wind would someday carry him into the blue sky, away.

I knew he was dying. And I had little time left with him.

I suddenly remembered the paper, sitting by flowers on the windowsill, and in a seamless movement, gave it to Nate to read.

And seeing his eyes light up, his expressions illuminating into a familiar soft smile, a reminder of how much he meant to me. He was the guiding hand that anchored my ambition, the teacher that always believed that no height was too high, no dream too big. A man I thought would live forever.

It was March when his health began to decline. He had fallen, severely lacerating much of his skull.

Arriving at the hospital, he had to wait hours in the emergency room before being given a bed. And despite needing acute medical intervention, he was discharged without explanation after only 2 days.

In the search for rehabilitative care, all he was given were either automated statements “We are not interested” or conditions of malicious neglect.

Returning home, he required 24-hour care, costing his family tens of thousands. However, his health had deteriorated to a critical state, and he needed to be admitted to the ICU. But the prospects given were bleak.

Nate had begun to wheeze, struggling to cough against the tubes and wires that connected to his lungs.

I hurry to his bedside and hold him, patting his back gently to help him breath. His body felt both fragile but heavy, slowly heaving up and down.

After some time, Nate’s breathing began to return to normal, and I readjust the pillows around his head, gently pulling the white linen blankets over his chest.

Nate regains his smile, tired but still glowing.

“So, Bill what did you bring today?”

Every time I came to visit, I would always cook something. (no strong flavors though). Picking tender shoots of asparagus before they bloomed into feathery stalks, walnut-colored shitakes mushrooms budding from oak logs.

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

A society is defined by how it protects the weak and the vulnerable.

However, Nate’s struggle in our healthcare system illustrates that at its principle, it is a system sustained only by models of cruel profit.

We have created this suffering, using unregulated and “black-box” AI algorithms to systematically deny; patients unable to afford medical care; families exhausted by immeasurable expenses; countless living the last of their life, broken, stolen of dignity and respect.

We have sanctioned this innate corruption and inhumanity.

And we must be the ones to change it.

I was the final student Nate had taught.

For years, I have had the opportunity to learn and gain an immense knowledge in the field of medicine.

But I am determined to make a change, to take the initiative to reform public health policy efficiently, effectively, and ethically. And above all, to guide and protect the vulnerable, the elderly, the patients, and their families, through compassion and empathy.

The rain had begun to wane, trickling into soft pools of warm light, the peach-colored peonies by the window quietly blossoming.

After some time, I remember hugging him tightly, closing my eyes.

“Tomorrow?”

“Ok, then”

“Ok”

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

I never said goodbye

The teaching goes on.