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On Sleeping In

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Every day, I adjust the alarm clock on my phone. Five minutes later, 15 minutes earlier, the exact time calculated precisely by me, factoring in the time of team rounds, the expected traffic on the way to the hospital, and the number of patients I have to see beforehand. As a third year resident, now finally a senior, the duty of pre-rounding thankfully passes over me, with one exception: if there is a patient in the ICU.

For days, weeks, that's where you've been: that cramped room in the intensive care unit. So earlier we round, and thus earlier I arrive each day, ready to tackle the list of overnight vitals and lines, decipher the vent settings and drips, update the team on your status. "She's the same, no big updates, nothing different than yesterday," I report, day in and day out. Stably sick, yet we all know, steadily dying.

Until one afternoon, a family meeting was called by our ICU colleagues and serendipitously discovered by my attending and me as we passed by your room. We immediately knew something

was different, seeing your family and friends gathered around your room, crying. We knew then you weren't stable. You were sick.

I sat like a fly on the wall in that meeting. Discussions of code status, of de-escalating care, of your wishes for life and death. Your family was brave, fighting back the tears as they spoke for you and listened. The ICU team was kind and calming; my own attending more eloquent and honest and raw than I've ever seen. I myself not speaking, partly because I didn't know the words to say, and partly because I did know but knew that if I said them I'd cry.

"Likely within the next 24 hours," they said. Your two young sons sobbed into their father's arms as they stared at this thin sliver of a person, their mother, and said their goodbyes. I said my own silent goodbye as I walked past your room one last time. Then, alone, I cried my own tears, followed by an impromptu therapy session by my attending, my mentor. His wise words stick with me: you were a part of her life, and a part of her death, and that means something.

Vulnerable and drained, I drove home. A quiet walk with my husband and a home-cooked dinner proved cathartic. Then two hours later, a simple text from my co-resident gave me the news I was expecting.

So I won't come in early tomorrow. I adjust the alarm on my phone. One less patient to see, one less note to write, one less patient to round on. I will sleep in, while you too finally rest.

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