

I Am Greek, After All

Category: Nursing

written by Akash Mallady | January 29, 2026

Her right hand trembled over the bedside phone. In her left hand was a laminated menu, worn at the corners, like her weathered hands. The cardiac acute care room was dimly lit, with sunlight peeking through the blinds.

I knocked softly on the doorframe. "I'm Akash," I said, "a volunteer. May I take a seat?"

"My name is Kate," she said, as her eyebrows drew together. She then turned back to the phone, as if she were waiting for the numbers to rearrange themselves into a pattern she recognized.

"May I help you order?" I asked.

She smoothed the creases of the laminated menu, her finger tracing circles around the entrees. "I would like the Greek Lemon Chicken." She looked up at me. "I am Greek, after all."

She held the menu like a map back to a place deeply rooted in her identity. Amidst the monitoring beeps and medication lists, in a room where everything was chosen for her, Kate's request felt deeply personal. However, I knew she was on a soft diet—the nurses had told me when I checked in with them. As I looked again at the menu, I remembered her comment: *I am Greek, after all.*

I asked her where in Greece she was from.

"Actually, my family was from there. I currently live in F-, Fr-, mmm." She paused.

"Franklin?"

"Yes, that's it!"

Now, with the sun unabashedly streaming through the blinds, I could make out well-thumbed Post-it notes strewn all over the bedside table. "I was in foster care," Kate said, leaning back. "I was moved around because of the way they treated me."

"I'm sorry," I said, "you didn't deserve that."

"The pastor also said that. Sometimes bad things happen to the strongest of us."

The silence was heavy but companionable.

I shifted my attention back to the menu. "The doctors want you on a soft diet right now," I offered, "to protect your heart." Her eyebrows knitted slightly, then relaxed.

We scanned the options and agreed on the soup. She began asking me questions about her heart condition and seemed to be trying to understand her health.

Finally, as I made my way to the door, she had one last question: "What's your name again?"

"Akash," I said, smiling.

I looked back and saw that she was writing it on a small, yellow Post-it. Though shaky, the pencil strokes were deliberate. I saw her press the bright yellow square on the plain white bedside table, right next to the closed menu.

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