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Goodbye

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Home for the holidays,
a ten hour drive.
My first time seeing Grandma
in over a year.
Dad says she has faded,
the amyloid plaques invading her memory
day by day.
I see her at the family dinner,
shockingly frail,
hardly the person who helped to raise me.

After dinner, I walk her dutifully to the car,
describing each step as we go,
because her degenerated eyes
cannot see in the dark.
On the drive to her house,
I prod her memory
to see if she is still there,
searching for some splinter, some shard
to prove I still exist
in her life.

I dig back to when
I used to shovel her drive,
or how I would set up
her Christmas tree
every year.

She says she remembers
that I am studying to be a doctor,
says she prays for me
every morning,
even if it is the only thing
she can still do for me.

Then I walk her up to the house,
the same precarious routine
of careful steps,
until we are safely inside.

I look around her house
where I spent so much
of my childhood,
the whole summer during the flood.
Everything looks smaller than I remember,
like the house and my Grandma
are shrinking into each other
until they remain only as a memory.

Once she is settled in,
I give her a hug and say goodbye,
but she wants to light up her Christmas tree
before I go.
I help her to plug it in, then

I give her a hug and say goodbye,
but we look at the picture on the wall
from my wedding day,
me, Grandma and my wife.
She doesn't remember
but pretends to, then

I give her a hug and say goodbye,
spending an extra moment in her
weak embrace,
reliving our memories
for the both of us,
because I fear this will be
my last goodbye.

Bryan Sisk, MD, is a paediatrics resident at St. Louis Children's Hospital, and a graduate of the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. He is pursuing a career in academic paediatrics with the goal of interweaving the humanities into medical education and clinical practice. His undergraduate training was in biochemistry at the University of Missouri—Columbia. He is an avid musician and writer, and is author of the book *A Lasting Effect: Reflections on Music and Medicine*. He serves currently as assistant editor of "In the Moment" humanities section at *Academic Pediatrics*, as well as editor of "SOMSRFT Monthly Feature" at *Pediatrics*. His prose and poetry has been published in several journals, including *The Examined Life*, *Hektoen International*, *Yale Journal for the Humanities in Medicine*, *Burning Word*, *Texas Heart Institute Journal* – "Peabody's Corner," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *Clinical Pediatrics*, *Miser Magazine*, and *Stethos*.