

# *The Final Goodbye*

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Someone once said, “The only time a goodbye is painful is when you know you’ll never say hello again,” and little did I know how painful it would be.

The hallways of the Alzheimer’s unit in the nursing home had never seemed so dull - the beige paint and white trim, giving the impression that memories made within these walls will never be happy. None of them, I thought, were. Each of the doors that stretched down the hall were white - some had big bold letters marking the patient’s room and others had light purple lettering - making the brown-beige carpet pop. My hands, clammy and cold, shook violently as we neared my grandfather’s room. The door read “Mack Kendall”, a name forever etched into my soul. I noticed the nurses, normally cheery towards us upon entry, were nodding and showed a great deal of sympathy - something I was not expecting.

“He is still in his room,” reported one of the nurses, “He hasn’t moved for a couple of days.”

My mother nodded towards the nurse, “Thank you.” Her hand gripped the bronze door handle, and I felt as though I was being held under the water, gasping for a breath I knew would never come.

The door slowly opened, revealing only the end of the hospital bed. My mother ushered us inside the cramped room. My heart shattered on the floor, spilling over him. I could see death pulling at his soul. His face was sunken in revealing the outline of bone, and his tousled head lay unmoving on the pillow. His eyes which opened only partially, weighed down by visions of death, were absent of all color and light. His tall and masculine frame was smaller, shriveled like a flower left alone in the dark. Light groans would escape his parched lips occasionally.

Although I tried valiantly not to believe it, everything in that moment had shown death holding his hand, pulling him into the unknown vacancy it holds. As it slid down my cheek, the warmth of the tear hinted that the pain one can inflict upon another by leaving, was greater than any physical pain I would ever feel. My heart hung as heavy as the full moon in the pitch black of nightfall.

“May I have a minute?” I mumbled.

“Of course,” my mother whispered as she and my sister left the room. I shuffled over to the brown chair resting beside his bed and took his hand in mine. It was not like I had remembered. It was not the same hand that had picked up mine as he kissed it goodbye, or the one I had yanked down the front porch steps at his house on Cherry Hill, proud of the scene I had made in the empty flower bed. Even though it was still his hand, it wasn’t...

Tears fell so fiercely like a waterfall after a rainstorm. I closed my eyes, “I promise I will not forget you like you did me. Gramps, I love you with all my heart.” I knew I had one last thing to say, but felt an undying sadness tied to the word that was so commonly spoken.

My mother entered the room, “It’s time to say goodbye.” Her face, blotchy from crying, peered around the corner. My little sister followed suit immediately, saying her goodbyes almost robotically. It took every ounce of courage left in me to even stand up from that chair. They left the room once more, and I knew it was my turn to say goodbye.

In spite of the fact that my heart contained gaping holes, that I felt my knees weaken, and that my eyes were on fire, I managed to look at him the same way I once had. The same way I did when he cracked stupid jokes, or when we sat at the dinner table telling stories. I gulped, “Goodbye.”