

White Christmas

They never have snow in Abilene
so four inches dropping wet
out of a wide, plains sky
on the twenty-sixth of December
is more miracle than ambiance

Grandpa, having slept the night
in jeans and boots in his chair
works up a smile as we pack ourselves
into the tiny hospital room

They've been expecting us

Grandma, one cheek drooping
stubborn as she forms her greeting
How are you-all?
her left hand lying soft, puffy
as dough in her lap
is dressed already for the holiday
in her red pant-suit
with the Indian-head nickel buttons
all buttoned and modest, pretending
the wheel-chair isn't there
Can you be-lieve this snow today?

Beyond the window a hastily-rolled snowman
is slowly lowering his twiggy arms, his face
sliding away under the sun

He will be gone in thirty minutes

My daughters, having given her the picture
of themselves and their sleds, are petting
Grandma's hand, singing softly
tracing lines to connect the brown spots
with the tips of their own tiny fingers
smoothing her rounded shoulders

Grandpa watches, eyes keener than ours
to the subtle changes—her eyes sinking deeper
the three second waves of blankness
the growing weight of her frame
as he lifts, pulls her into bed
and the fading of something unnamable
something central to her dignity

her integrity
something his granddaughters feel
without knowing as they pat and stroke
her pale skin

Therapy time, the nurse intrudes
and Grandma tugs my sleeve
as they wheel her by *Don't work*
too hard
when you go back home
she slurs, *enjoy*
your day in the sun

And Grandpa follows them down the hall
to make certain, among other things
the nurses take care with Grandma's buttons