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April 6, 2014: The Death of a Grandmother

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Title: The Death of a Grandmother

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4/6/2014—A friend of mine died this week. Far too young. She will be missed by her husband of many years and by friends and family—and by my children. She will be missed most of all by her grandson, a 4-year-old boy. He has no conception of death. Yesterday, he was wondering, wherever Grammy went, why she did not take her glasses. I have heard a number of people wondering how to talk to him about death. This is not a religious family, which makes things harder but more honest. So there is nothing about heaven and that sort of thing. But it is so brutal to say simply that she is gone. Nor is it really true. Grammy is not gone, any more than my mother and father are gone. In some ways, I feel closer to my mother and father since their deaths. Their presence now is more comforting to me than when they were alive. We have an symbol, strangely appealing, for this experience. It is supernatural, to be sure, and so not strictly accurate, whatever that might mean. But it does capture something, something real and true. So, if I had a chance to talk to this grandson—and I probably will not, since I am not that close to him—I think I would say the following. Grammy is now an angel, looking out for you. Now, you can talk to her anytime at all. And if you listen very quietly, you will hear her voice. Forever.