STRUGGLING TO CATCH UP:
FAMILIES, IDENTITIES, AND NARRATIVE CARE

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Families perform many morally valuable functions for their own members, not the least of which is providing care when they are ill or injured. I argue that a second family function—that of sustaining their members’ personal identities—is deeply implicated in that care. After explaining the narrative nature of identity maintenance, I discuss three cases where family care givers must find the right stories to repair the identity of one of their own: where the identity has been repudiated, where the identity lies at the limits of responsibility, and where the patient has lost her second nature. As I examine these cases, I argue that if health care professionals recognize and respect this familial caring labor, they can do a better job of providing the patient with their own form of care.