

# Bookends of a Life: II

*by* Linda Simoni-Wastila

Only the steady thump-thump of the hissing machine, valves pressing and depressing against your will, remind me you are here. Like you, I dress in white; like you, many patients call me angel and I guess I am, administering to their wounds and sighs and bedpans and now, ministering to you, embellishing the chart with your vitals, watching you waste to a shrunken, wheezing vessel. The clacking ventilator reminds me of the ice cubes rattling in your highball the nights I nagged you to stop, your hands jittering between the glass and the cigarette, but your yellowed fingers stabbed and twisted the butt into ashes, proving you did not love me. You moan and turn your withered face to the weak gasp of winter sun bullying its way through the window. It's only a matter of time, I rationalize, and fiddle with the tubing, adjusting the flow. The morphine races down the catheter to your wrist and I wonder: Mama, did I love you enough?

