

Habits Die Hard

by Linda Simoni-Wastila

The radiologist's fingers glow against the back-lit film, red rivers tracing blackened craters of the paranasal sinus. Pulse jack-hammering at his jaw-line, my father leans toward the x-ray. I reach for his hand, bird bones in mine; although radiation and chemo rendered him a wraith, his fingertips quaver from adrenalin.

"The tumor has shrunk," the doctor says.

In an etherized daze, we stumble up, thank our caretaker and falter through halls stinking of sanitized despair. In the morning's cold blaze, my father tents his hand around the trembling flame, inhales. I pull my coat closer, prepare for the next battle.

