



# Breathless

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here's how it starts,  
before the doctor diagnoses,  
“idiopathic dysphagia,”  
before the doctor suggests,  
“laryngoscopy,”  
before you cough a second time and say,  
“choked on saliva again” –

we're in the hospital waiting room, watching a fish tank  
while fluorescent lights pour down from above,  
while a sea of voices and footsteps washes through the air

that's when your hands start clutching your throat  
when your face turns  
purple  
and you are  
gasping  
    for air  
as if drowning  
one heartbeat  
at a time

and then I can't breathe  
either  
as my heart thuds in my ears  
as I watch the nurse  
fold your  
    waist forward  
then slap your back  
then do a Heimlich maneuver  
and I can't let  
go  
of my  
breath  
until I hear you  
cough once  
and breathe again.

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