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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