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They Say She Says it Hurts When She Breathes

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They Say She Says it Hurts When She Breathes

In a beggar's pull, gram took a drag off life
moist and ill
with a fighting push, out it snored
smelling of baked bread

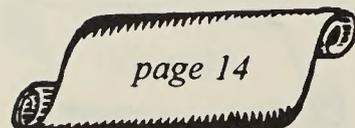
Does she have anyone besides you?
No, they're dead.

We're it for us, I sighed to myself
shifting in the footlights

I stoop to listen
Is her hearing aid or her heart beeping
Maybe it's just me
hoping trace enzymes weren't
a heart attack
Pneumonia seems plenty at 82

Humming, venting, gurgling
in a sing-song chorus
Blue-white fluorescent
staging for
a falling star in an anonymous gown

Gnarled fingers that once changed my diaper
now hold on for life to
icy bed railings
To pry them free would be to break them



Suited to snorkel
laboratory tubules bent sloppily
shoved up her snout
but strong arms shout "Away!"
Preventing her comfort
for her own good and for ours

Fevered or sleeping deeply, I pondered
Aghast at another dreadful
labored cackle
her poor heart must stop midway

Oh, wake up and play with me gram

Winded now,
coughing in a cranking rhythm
much like a cold engine block
turning over and over
sputtering stopping

Please don't die.

By: Janyce Hamilton

*"Perhaps someday it will be pleasant to remember even this."
- Virgil, c. 20 B.C.*

