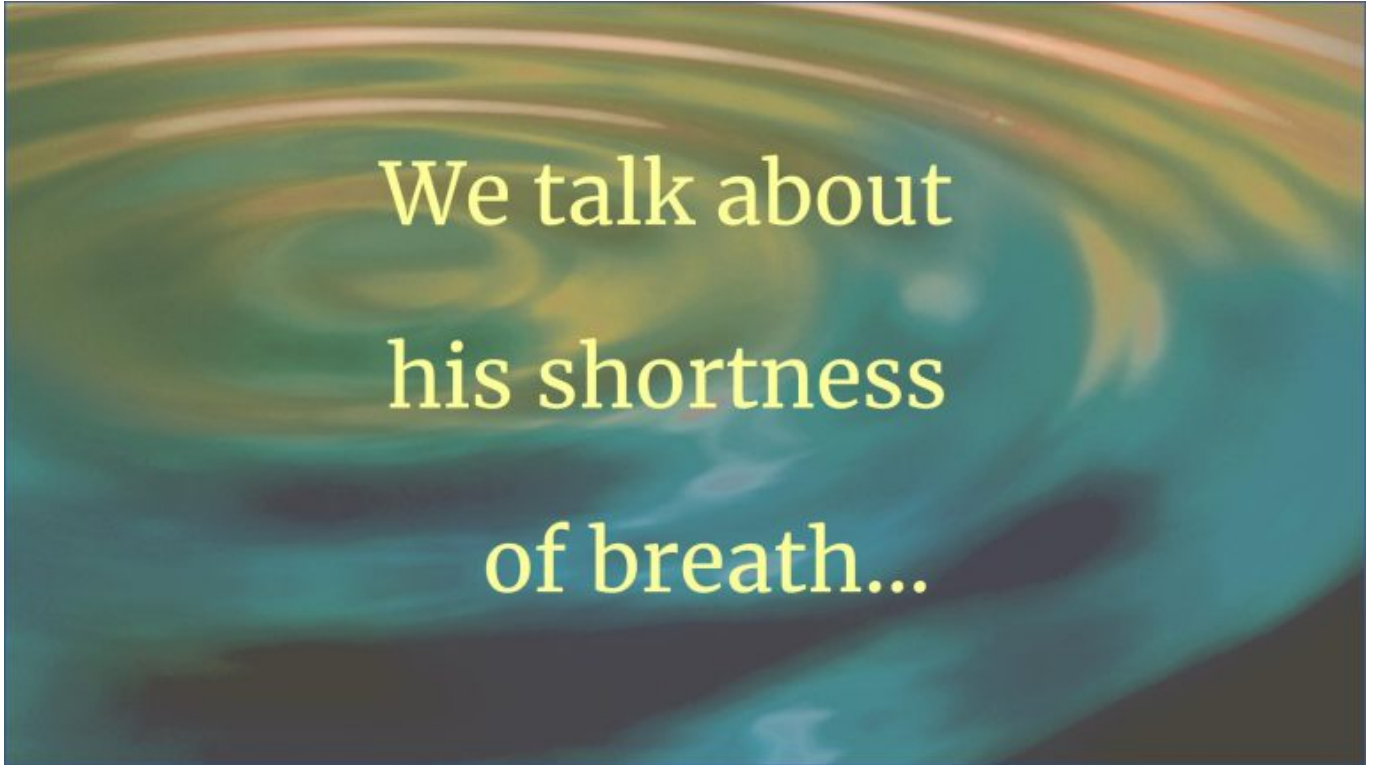


Chilled Breaths

Category: Poems

written by Ellen Zhang | February 17, 2023



Stepping off the bus, the first faces
I see are the same every February.
Hard construction hats, yellow vests
flashing, grit etched upon their faces.
Daylight Savings ensures that these
are the last sights of light before
entering sterile linoleum floors.

When he enters my clinic, I do a
double take. Who would have guessed
that I would remember his face without
the construction uniform? We talk about
his shortness of breath, cough with
yellow sputum, worsening fatigue.

These mornings, I search for him
between chilled breaths. Sometimes,
he is working to expand the new
bridge. Other times, he is chatting
with friends, taking a smoke.

In two weeks, his imaging shows
a peripheral mass that we biopsy
In another two weeks, I will
refer him to oncology. In time,

I no longer search for him, the
cranes move on elsewhere,
and each day is a little longer.