Harrow House
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First and Last Breath

by
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He lies in a bed in some small
New York hospital coughing up globs

of cigarette fragments which had been
drowning his 70-year-old lungs, as my

eldest daughter, eight then, leans
over his side rail to offer him tissue

after tissue which she then tosses into
that brown paper bag taped to his side rail,

preventing his tumble onto that hard
linoleum floor. She then massages his hands,

and combs his hair. It was as if she knew what
a dying man needed, her own grandfather,

and how he intuitively knew the day she was born
to hop into his Red Impala and drive six hours

from New York to Montreal to see—but not touch—
her face through thick premature nursery glass doors,

as she struggled for life with her four-pound self
plugged into a plethora of machines, and oxygen

purifying her lungs, similar air her grandfather
so much craved during his end. It must have been
this breath which had always connected them.