

You Can Now Breathe

By Rachel Swiednicki

On a beach with my son, sand between our toes, laughing and playing. My, how a moment it can all be swept away in the tempest.

The look the technician gave me—
etched into my gut—
a silent verdict.
Life would never be the same.

She lies in bed, her prison for months, scalp hidden beneath cloth to conceal what's been taken. Another hospital visit. More needles. More tests.
The sharp chorus of beeps from machines climbs my spine like cold fingers, burning my ears and piercing my forehead.

The sting of sterile soap in the air burning the sinuses, a bitter reminder:
this is not where I imagined myself.
Paperwork piles up. The same questions. The same hollow answers.
No change.

Another surgery. Another scar. More pain.
How did I get here?

I run my hands along my chest—numb. I trace the space where they once lived. Where life once flowed, where my babies fed, now—emptiness.
Betrayed by my own body, they became my death sentence.

Whispering to myself:

You are brave.
You are beautiful.
You can breathe now.

They won't see your battle wounds, sacrifices, or fear. Life will never be the same.

You won't whisper anymore, you will speak loud and clear, standing tall - I'm still here.