

## **Losing it**

*Kate Webster*

Fighting for breath; eyes streaming, heart pounding,  
In pain. Wheezing, squeezing air out of me  
Ribs aching, face going into spasm –  
So funny that it hurts.

Intercostal muscles wrap our rib cage,  
As finely controlled as fingers on a  
Keyboard; producing the air flow that makes  
Us the only speaking mammal

Until laughing sends them into spasm.  
Laughter overwhelms speech, takes our motor  
Control and our ideas of what's OK -  
"I shouldn't laugh, but..." said laughing.

Thought I knew what made me laugh, funny bone  
Finely honed by hours spent in small dark  
Clubs, rooms above pubs. That laughter was for  
Comedy, not evolution,

For making and maintaining social bonds.  
When we can't speak for laughing, what that says:  
"I agree, I understand, We're part of  
The same group – you're someone I like."

If you ask us when we laugh, we'll say at jokes.  
But watch us laugh, you'll see that it's with friends.  
My seven year old sister, covered in  
Stickers, stuck on by Elodie,

Une Francaise de sept ans; no shared words, but  
A shared sense of funny. Tickle rats, they  
Laugh – after a while, they'll laugh when they see  
The tickler walk into the room,

Expecting to be tickled, being right.  
When things go wrong, trains long gone, our hearts and  
Phone screens broken, freezers left open, we  
Say "We'll laugh about this later".

Comedy's tragedy in the rear view  
Mirror, funnier when it's behind us.  
There's nothing you can't joke about, if your  
Joke's good enough. We know

If we can laugh together, we'll get through this.

Kate Webster got interested in science through comedy and has written plays about alternate universes, the Voyager space probe, the neuroscience of laughter and making first alien contact. She's still finding out how much she doesn't know, was longlisted for The Old Vic 12 in 2015 and is a finalist in the RED Women Theatre Awards.