Respiration

By Jamaal May

A lot of it lives in the trachea, you know.
But not so much that you won’t need more muscle:
the diaphragm, a fist clenching at the bottom.
Inhale. So many of us are breathless,
you know, like me
kneeling to collect the pottery shards
of a house plant my elbow has nudged
into oblivion. What if I sigh,
and the black earth beneath me scatters
like insects running from my breath?
Am I a god then? Am I insane
because I worry about the disassembling of earth
regularly? I walk more softly now

into gardens or up the steps of old houses
with impatiens stuffed in their window boxes.
When it’s you standing there with a letter
or voice or face full of solemn news,
will you hold your breath before you knock?

Source: Poetry (January 2016)