

# 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)