

Breathing

by Alba Brunetti

To know myself better I begin meditating. I try several times in different traditions and always the same anxiety — a desire to claw at myself, or run, or stop and yell, *Enough!* at the top of my lungs, until I find the right teacher. And I learn to trust myself and listen to my own breath. Inhale. A millisecond stop. Exhale. I close my eyes and breathe and come to find peace. I learn to see myself through the eyes of love and I can let go and float. I come to connect myself to that bliss and remind myself of it when I am caught in the subway, trudging up the last stairs to my office building or walking down the long hall to the bathroom.

After only a few months' practice I am able to dive deep within myself. Inhale. A millisecond stop and I am under the surface. I know there is something here within myself — some treasure that I have come to find. It is within each of us — each the same, each different. If I lift it from the sand, it would fit in my hand. If I bring it closer and just observe it, I know it will open to me. The hard shell, the soft flesh and then the gift, the grace, the rarest thing, the black pearl. When I see it for the first time, I think — how can I have forgotten you? But that is how all beauty is — a remembering and forgetting. I remember and forget myself. Who am I? The black pearl is opaque. Why? The black pearl is opalescent. What does it all mean? The black pearl circles my palm and answers me, “Beauty. Breath. Journey.”

To me it seems that the black pearl is our knowing, made from a little sand that causes an irritation to our soft flesh, an encasing of our soul — made from the work of time, made in the heart of God. When I see I remember — when I am lost in the daily world, I forget. From the tip of one wave to another — this must be done and this must be done and now this. It is so easy to forget. It is easy to even forget breathing. Now at the surface — Exhale.

I have come close to other people's breath — my niece whose infant breath I would listen to and catch along the back of my fingers to make sure she was well, my father as he struggled to fill his lungs before he died, my lover whose exhale I would hungrily try to inhale so much did I want to be a part of him. What would I tell him now? My love, you are always the same — I take you in, I let you go.

