

Ken Meisel

My Father's Trombone Speaks to Me at the Winston Motel

All night I watched my father's labored breathing, his drunken body like a slide trombone, gaunt and shiny, his cheeks, caved in, defeated, his mouth, a wide bore hole as he gasped, horned the hallow air out, sucked it deep back in again, broken black feathered birds choking his lungs, while his trachea, like a telescopic slide, moved and muscled breaths back and forth down tubular throat stem, while beside him, on a small brown table the dozen bottles of liquor, the little green men stood guard watching him and me. Outside the cracked motel window a couple argued, spat curses at each other while the neon sign blinked on and off, a consciousness flickering sickly, while cars and trucks zoomed by. And as I sat there with him, I counted his breaths, each a slide position on a trombone with a particular song note until I fell into a boy's dream. And I heard my father's last six or seven breaths gently escaping from him—the second breath from last which would be the final breath he'd take upon the release of spirit—which would be that intrepid stardust breath, that sentimental journey breath, that dipsy-doodle breath bringing to bear the immaterial give away of soul purling free until the final breath, which would be the lowest fundamental, the depressing of all the remaining trombone valves, which I saw would be his freedom, his death. And on the eighth breath I woke up, startled, alone, the lazy traffic humming outside the window of the motel stirring me awake, and a person in the next room, someone sleepless, moved from the window back to chair, and turned the television volume up, it was a cigarette commercial, while the sky outside broke soapy gray

with dawn, with birds and cars. And when my father woke up, his eyes dim as porch lights in fog, his hair, spiked up, mud gray, he took my hand,

gently, he pulled me to him, me, his oldest son, and he gathered to him all my longing, all my lost hours like he was collecting to him all the

musical notes in me, all the genetics of mine and his namesake, our samenames, and he collected me into himself, into his Irish blood.

And he lit a cigarette like it was a tiny sun, something small and heated he and I could smoke together so that it would awaken us. And he

confided in me that he'd dreamed I was a seven position trombone—my eyes full of golden sunlight, my being full of energetic heraldry,

my hands, fire brand finches full of freedom, my spirit, a bursting brassiness, slender and dense with bugle pronouncements, my body,

all slide brass and cone, lithe and green with eagerness to live, my mouth a wide bore, warm and rich with Irish laughter, with

honking words of poetry babbling forth, my young heart, melodic and soulful, a dark muscle beneath sternum and rib, drowned

in doubt—and I was crushed and silent, a muzzled horn, until he woke up, and he held me.

