

Three Poems · *Robin Behn*

FRENCH HORN

The name, you might think,
if you're twelve, and you know,
is like those kisses

someone will do to you
if you're lucky and remember
to let him. But how far down

your body will he go?
There's something like entrails
about all this gaggle of tubing

like a hospital i.v.
or how someone in the textbook
jailed up Cleopatra's hair.

And launching out of silence
to hit just the right note
is next to impossible, and so, in this, it is like

kisses, also. In public this thing
should wear a dress over its guts
like the girls who are good at it—one

especially, born
with no right hand.
But you have to put your hand *in*

to mute it, or let it
moan . . . What our bodies
were suited for was an

increasing mystery,
which may be why we envied
her efficient, perfect flipper,

which somehow worked best for this
as if the same template of wind
around whose body the brass tubes

had formed, had formed
her body, so she belonged more
to the horn than

the other way around.
We could see it carrying her home from school,
we could see its bell blooming

in her sweet broad face, and of course
it made us jealous, how she retained
1st chair, how the band leader doted

on her for whom the centuries of hounds
must have bounded,
after which had galloped

the lord's most velvet page
with his second, keyless, exterior, piercing
and definitely most heavenly curled brass throat.

What was he thinking, that one without the gun
whom all the guns charged after?
What was he saying in the back of his mouth

that narrowed and loosened
at will around the source of breath and made
the fall air need him? Was he that much like a woman

he needed one like her
as if to know himself by the slight
mammalian difference of his hand

stroking hers? We imagined
her sleep, where we thought she must have worn it,
(we worried, too, *If I die before I wake . . .*)

her right “hand” still lodged
in that brass extravagance with which
she’d be fit to shake heavenly hands;

and, on the pillow, like a receiver left dangling
in case a wayward god needed someone to confess to,
the trumpet-flower mouthpiece, open-ended

as the story in which a fox gets caught
doubling back to speak his peace
into her oiled body

which curves and flowers and over
the centuries develops three keys, three
left-handed means

that allow us to fast-forward in the one
stunning rip from deformity to grace
that opens, that is

the hunt.