

MITCHELL JACOBS

Ministrations for the French Horn

Cochlea, tender coil,
French horn of the inner ear.
It hears me play this rusty horn
that lately rasps.

I remember
the boy beside me in band class
who knew this instrument's ins
and outs. He took mine into his lap
and coaxed it apart.

The labyrinth
unraveled, each slide slid out
like a U transformed, new vowel
in a brass alphabet. He greased
their lengths, nimble fingertips
attuned to surfaces. The give
and resistance as he pressed
the keys. As he polished,
the flaring bell allowed his hand
to enter.

When he placed his lips
to the cold mouthpiece, his throat
opened into its golden throat
that spoke what he spoke, but in
another tongue.

Oh, in the crescendo
of his solo, the room filled and rattled
and I realized I could love

a boy.
How I would dream him cradling
the curve of me, fingers along
my vertebrae, his right hand lower,

shifting, his breath
against my cheek.

Cochlea,
hidden in the motions of your hairs
lies his voice, a sound I cannot resurrect.
If only there were oil for your hollows.
If only I could coax from you
the voice that blew warm all through me,
saying, *This is how.*