

Aspects of Kelly's Death

KEN MEISEL

When the boy stopped breathing
it was because he'd lived one day
too long, anyhow.

The parents gathered, and there was
only the noise of quiet machinery,
bleeping on, embarrassed.

It was sort of like a dream continuing on
after the dreamer had awakened,
and he'd left the bed. Even the lights
of the machinery kept insisting it wasn't,
couldn't be over.

The heart breaks into thirty thousand
small stars. That's just the rule...

It's less important that the heart breaks
than it is how the heart breaks.

A broken heart is out of pace
with the events that have broken it.
And so, the medical personnel passing
the boy's dead body, were nervous,
and the parents, too, passed into a

kind of reluctance, and the boy,
up above them, watched, his two
eyes not really even interested.

Once, an hour earlier, there was
a nurse, a Filipino, who took the
boy's soft, extinguished hand in hers,
and she wept, and hummed a small
old island song to him about where
fishing boats go when they're lost
at sea. And who cares for them, then.

Somewhere, at any time, there is a
person who knows exactly that another person
is passing away. The dead always have
somebody.

And then, somebody pulled the sheet
over his head. It was a dry zip. Crisp.

The daylight, because it is curious and
explores everything, stretched a yellow
aura over the dead boy's dead body.

The bells of a church rang. I'm sorry
for that irrelevant little detail. I apologize.

The soul, leaving a body lying dead
on a bed looks at first like a folded
blade of paper exiting a wound. And then
it puckers up, explodes out, and some
people think they see the northern lights.

The boy, lying there, was suddenly there
and not there. And he stretched, as if
he was exiting one of those clear plastic bags
that the dry cleaners put starched
shirts in, after they've been dry cleaned.

In fact, the boy felt starched, *invigorated*,
really, before he was cleansed in light.

He escaped through the brick wall. He felt soft
feathers unfolding behind him. He flew free.

Here's an image of death I like, because it
settles the poem:

Then the last petal falls
from the rose onto the
white doily. And it sits
there, the petal, like an
anguished little boat,

something withered, or
stranded, dried out, like
a lone day of a week
gone beyond itself.

The mother sits there watching it.

The bells ring, and then there's
silence. The anguished hours.

Nothing is left but resignation,
and the dead solve that one
already for us. No need to ask.

What to do with the petal?

The rest of the rose, well, that's
the body, and it's not relevant.