

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

CD Collins

I Am Losing Everything

I lost my inheritance in the streets of Somerville. I've invited another man into my house.

Rocks? he asks. *You don't have rocks?*

He drinks my bourbon, slow-melting amber, sipping honeys ripened especially for him. We are watching the Nixon/Kennedy debates from 1960. They are speaking in whole paragraphs, the King's English, instead of perseverating bumper sticker bytes with puppet-like gestures intended to reach the American people.

Who are these people, these American people?

He toasts the TV, says, *They had a lot of class back then.*

Now which class might that be? I say they have a lot of class *now*, a class so stratospherically high they can't see what's underfoot, the struggle and noise, the dirty and unkempt. Now *that's* class! I am losing everything.

I have lost my glasses, I unpack boxes and boxes, what to keep what to throw away, slide book after book onto the shelves, the lifespan of silk worms, the atavistic fables and particle accelerators. Time snakes by me like fluid subway trains. Without my glasses, the world approaches and recedes, I can't think at all clearly, I'm rather *unfocused*, a bit snowed under.

My teeth are falling out, my hands full of fillings, molars and rubber tubes, I return them to their sockets, everything feels so big in there, tongue like a fiber-optic camera, surveys the collapsed scaffolding. I have a craving for paint chips and bits of plastic; I am lacking something, some mineral.

I see people on a yacht with thick hair, Bermuda shorts, deck shoes. They are thinking about the way the sky meets the sea, how the blues vibrate together, their skin tanned and fragrant, pink nails with perfect half moons at the cuticle. Someone scrubs their sinks, broils their steaks, no clutter in their houses, no scribbled scraps paper, no bits of blood-stained skin curled and blackened in the corners.

It takes a dozen lives to live one of the lives on this yacht sailing straight for the horizon, you have to own a country for life to be this simple. You have to use up everything.

I find my glasses under the driver's seat, fish them out, hoping to free them without crushing them. Now it's all buried under overdue notices, phone bills with false charges which I will have to dispute, medical bills from laboratories I've never heard of, eyes of caged and starving tigers.

Everyday, a man in boots antagonizes the tiger, machines its spirit into ball bearings sliding out of control. With \$25, they tell me, I can stop this man, the number is circled in red, but the phone rings, the word *unknown* appears on the receiver. I don't know her, but she seems to know me very well.

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She tells me to reach inside my shoulder, the frail lining of cartilage that houses the head of the humerus, a delicate mouth holding the living egg,

You don't need that, she whispers. And it's true, my life is full of things I'm not sure I need — tubes and needles drawing out marrow, nerves, oxygen.

I reach inside my shoulder and pull out the cartilage and take a bite. I have always loved cartilage and connective tissue. But now my arms will not have the most mobile joint in the body, winding up to throw a baseball or grenade, one hand scoops a lost baby, the other shoots its mother, oh, we don't leave behind our wounded, I am losing the structure.

Rocks? He says, the atoms of his touch heavy as plutonium, Got any rocks? Yeah, they had class, a lot of class back then.

My house is falling, parts of my body, time whooshes by like blue racer snakes, I've lost the people deepest in me that held up the columns, my twins, my merged identities. I lose scraps of paper, important numbers, but maybe it's all here, Byzantine links weaving back to the whole, shouts from the street, a shard of laughter, a girl buys me chocolate, wraps me in her jacket as we walk in the leaves like autumn at Ricky Nelson's house, and for a moment I'm okay, for a moment, I love everything.

I work a problem inside my head, how to forgive, how to forgive, I wake at four in the morning, shake my head, *No, no, no, you have to do better*. Are you my silenced sister, my lost twin brother, a broken tiger mother in a box marked *urgent*?

I turn myself inside out, empty into the world's edges which cuts off bits and savors, melts and sucks till I am see-through thin, waiting for that last crackling occlusion, when I lose structure. For life to be this simple, to find anything, to love anyone, I've got to lose and lose and lose.

KENTUCKY NATIVE CD COLLINS follows the storytelling traditions of the South, both as a solo artist and when accompanied by musicians. As one of originators of the early '90s resurgence of spoken-word with live music, her work has been archived in award-winning compact discs: *Kentucky Stories*, *Subtracting Down* and *Carousel Lounge*.

Collins' fiction has appeared in numerous literary magazines including *StoryQuarterly*, *Salamander*, *Phoebe* and *The Pennsylvania Review*. Her collection of poetry, *Self-Portrait with Severed Head*, was published by Ibbetson Street press in 2009. Her collection of short stories, *Blue Land*, was released by Polyho Press in June 2009. This collection includes the Pushcart nominee "Sin Vergüenza."

She has produced a short lyric documentary based which chronicles the catastrophic steps of mountaintop removal to retrieve Appalachian coal. With her band, *Rockabetty*, she is currently recording a new compact disc entitled, *Clean Coal/ Big Lie*.

For more information please visit cdcollins.com.