

A Poem by Michael Patrick Collins

My Soul Discusses the Iceman I Saw on my Walk Home from Work

“Emboldened by the sun this morning,
you shiver home now through the hissing wind
that seems some visceral foreboding
of a catastrophic yet just comeuppance
in the near future you fear will whittle you
home like rats’ teeth gnashing a corpse,
if you don’t complete its list of tasks
that you never could read and now seem to have
lost,

so that it makes little practical sense,
the way you stop here, wind-chilled,
to gaze at this half-consumed snowman,
who’s battled the midday sun, come out
part melted, a concave face, and branch arms
waving just slightly, their sockets loosened
by erosion; one ripe tomato eye
lies before him on his icy floor,
and yet this cold seems to have kept him
alive, his meltings caught by wind,
rehardened as a second ice skin
that glistens like glass and thumps
under the touch like a brass knocker.

Today, too aware of how beings of water
slosh perilous back and forth
like the great oceans they all copy,

you gaze at ice and say, *It is holy*.
Because seeing any of those it resembles,
your body stirs with remembering mittens
and goulashes, something inside you
forgets the morose empire of winter,
in a child's voice murmurs, *Mother, Father*.

Because its gleaming, cornerless surface
confounds the last rays of defeated sun,
making of disfigurement some strange victory,
you name it *Impossible*, name it *Miracle*.
For other snowmen have been made and dressed
and played their parts in children's games,
exchanged knowing glances with old men,
then paid the season its slow due.

Yet some hope inside you seems to whisper
that this one will stay on in glory,
through the lawn scorching and ice cream vendors,
indifferent to lawn sprinklers and hedge sheers.
Having seen so many melted, remade
the next season as near perfect images
of one another, he'd offer – you dream –
spectacular stories of snowfolk perceiving,
in uncanny moments, flashes of particles,
features in others they're almost certain
parts of them must recall from lost years,
when they were others now forgotten.
You almost raise hands in praise, almost kneel
in thanks for this secret wisdom, this power.

What made you begin to imagine
the long days of one who could not quiver

if he wished, breathe deep and shudder,
or even remember the once wild feelings
of first withstanding the last frost,
discovering dew, conquering Spring,
imagine how, waiting still, waiting only
for what will never be allowed him,
he would have lost your kind's fluidity,
remembering only that brave day,
when he slew death, denied himself

last words with which he would have told you
that you are in a still place between thinking
the world will never repay your love
and thinking love therefore means nothing,
despairing first that such fears make you weak,
then that they make you verminous, frightful?
He would have told you they make you alive,
would have said formlessness is your freedom.
He would have told you these ideas
are not what he says but what you can hear.”

Michael Collins is a graduate of Kalamazoo College, the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers, and Drew University. He teaches creative and expository writing at New York University. His work has recently appeared or will appear in *BlazeVOX*, *Dressing Room Poetry Journal*, *Red Savina Review*, *Blood Lotus Journal*, *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*, *Grist: The Journal for Writers*, *Kenning Journal*, *Pank*, *Smartish Pace* and *SOFTBLOW*. He lives in Mamaroneck, New York, with his wife, Carol.