



Echolocation

Myfanwy Collins

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Sometimes the voices that call you home lead you astray...

Cheri and Geneva grew up on “a little patch of nothing made up of dairy farms in the valleys and boarded up iron-ore mines in the mountains, a town of old folks waiting to die and young people dying to leave.” Now, Cheri has fled that life for the city, leaving Geneva behind to care for their aunt as she succumbs to cancer. Her death draws them back together, forcing them to face their past—and each other. When Cheri’s mother turns up with a strange baby and a dangerous secret close behind, the choices that follow will push all of them beyond boundaries they never thought they’d cross.

In this stunning debut novel, Myfanwy Collins lays bare the hearts of three lost women called together by their own homing instincts in a season that will change their lives—and the place they call home—forever.

What people are saying about *Echolocation*:

“Myfanwy Collins tells a deep and resonant story about people she loves, and along the way shows us how to love them as well.”

—Dorothy Allison, author of *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Cavedweller*

“Fearless, elegant, and accessible, *Echolocation* is literary fiction at its best. With heartbreakingly beautiful prose, Myfanwy Collins tells a gripping and tender tale of broken souls yearning for wholeness. These are characters who will stay with you long after you turn the last page. It’s a dazzling debut!”

—Ellen Meister, author of *The Other Life*

“Myfanwy Collins has the goods. It’s that simple. *Echolocation* is about love in all its magnificent slipperiness; it’s about how secrets bind us rather than rend us; it’s about the endless series of personal reinventions we call a lifetime. And these are things we had all better be thinking—and reading—about, if we plan to try and get out of this alive.” —Ron Currie Jr., author of *God is Dead* and *Everything Matters!*

“Myfanwy Collins’ debut novel calls to mind the grim and radiant work of Daniel Woodrell. From page one, I was chilled by the landscape, caught up in the trouble, and riveted by these women of northernmost New York who slam back together and figure out how live with what’s missing.” —Pia Z. Ehrhardt, author of *Famous Father and Other Stories*

“A moving and delicate novel, tracing the poignant destinies of women who long for a home they never had.” —Laila Lalami, author of *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* and *Secret Son*

“Get ready to fall madly, sadly in love with the fiction of Myfanwy Collins.” —Benjamin Percy, author of *The Wilding* and *Refresh, Refresh*

Echolocation Details

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Author : Myfanwy Collins

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From Reader Review *Echolocation* for online ebook

Susan Rukeyser says

Read *Echolocation*'s first chapter and you'll be unable to do anything but devour the entire book immediately. It's a perfectly-crafted opener, and one which sets the tone and pace of the storytelling you're about to enjoy.

Echolocation is a beautifully structured book. Its captivating plot and back stories are revealed in ways that call to mind exactly the phenomenon from which it takes its title. Each character's story starts small and tight, with acutely observed detail, then vibrates outwards, expanding to encompass time, disappointment, loss, offering insight into the past with morsels of information. It returns to the present with ever-increasing intensity.

The death of Auntie Marie means big changes for the women of her family. Theirs is a family complicated by unclear relationships and too much silence. Only one-armed Geneva remains in their tiny upstate NY town, helping to run the family's gas station and store. Cheri and Renee must return in their own ways, fleeing danger both within and without, not necessarily understanding why they return. Auntie Marie is their only constant. As if by instinct, they fly towards the space she leaves behind.

The language of *Echolocation* is gorgeous and rhythmic, almost seductive, even when describing the least pretty human behaviors. Collins is a precise storyteller. She knows which words are enough. We come to care deeply for Geneva, Cheri, Renee, and the others, despite their terrible choices. There are strong male characters but this feels like a book of women—the best sort, not the least bit clichéd. These women do ugly things and hurt those who love them. But Collins insists we see they're worthy of our respect and compassion. None of these women are hopeless, Collins seems to want us to know. Redemption is always possible—in part, at least, and however late. These characters are called home and away like bats to the forest, each return taking a slightly different path. Their looping journeys are messy and inexact. But they're as inevitable as the winter's frozen earth and the thaw, every Spring.

Steve says

As a number of other reviewers have said, Myfanwy Collins' *Echolocation* is a novel that confounds expectations. Two almost-sisters are brought home to a small, isolated town in northern New York by the impending death of their almost-mother, whose own half-sister also returns years after walking out on her family. So it's a family story, about generations of women and their hard feelings, but not really, or rather not *only*.

The novel opens with one of the sisters, Geneva, cutting trees for firewood:

She was down by the quarry, just off the old logging road, claiming a patch of ground Auntie Marie had given her for a wedding present — her dowry. “Don't tell him, though,” Marie suggested about the wooded acre. “Keep that land to yourself.” Geneva had thought of using the trees for sugaring as Auntie Marie had proposed but now it was too late. She was taking the trees for cheap firewood to sell to tourists at a roadside stand.

Geneva regrets the felling even as she performs it, because “It felt like a betrayal, this taking of saw to tree.” And in an act of fate if not fatality, the chainsaw slips and she loses an arm. This marks Geneva, not only in the obvious way but because the aftermath of this act in which she thought only of short-term gains (sacrificing long term potential for cash in hand) is an awareness of consequences and an ability to conceive of the future, something every other character in the novel seems to lack. She’s able to cast a cold eye on the past, while others nurse old hurts and cling to hazy recollections of who someone was a long time ago instead of noticing who they are now.

Other characters sleep with strangers, commit crimes, run out on each other, and generally fall victim to their own lack of forethought and vision. They’re focused on instant gratification, while Geneva aims to protect what she has, even when that protection turns violent. And *Echolocation* does get violent, very much so: what starts in the guise of a family saga enters country noir territory quickly, and brutally. So quickly, in fact, that as two characters set off on parallel courses to an inevitably showdown, I thought, “Already? If the big tension is happening now, how will it be sustained?” I was made suddenly aware, as a reader, of my own looking forward: I saw the amount of book left, the distance in pages, and it played against expectation with what felt like a third act escalation coming so soon.

Those dual tensions, from the plot itself and from my own thwarted assumptions, kept me both engrossed in the story and wondering, in the back of my mind, what Collins was going to do with all this. And what she did was impressive: ultimately, *Echolocation* goes where so few stories that build toward violence have the vision or courage to go: all the way to the aftermath. This isn’t a stories that winds up as soon as the clash has occurred, in which characters presumably settle back into routine once the action is over. Instead, it makes us keep looking, and makes us keep waiting, forcing us to wonder how an ordinary person — not a criminal, not a lost soul — comes back once they’ve been pushed too far. And it does so with grace, not only in the writing — especially the rich, textured renderings of the natural world — but in a final scene that even if you *think* you see it coming a few pages off (the event of it, anyway) still manages to sneak up and suddenly open a panorama as vast as the future, rather than a more familiar contraction of conflict.

Bookish says

Although the author is a dear friend and colleague, I am reviewing this book with an objective eye. *Echolocation* is a story about a dysfunctional family of women from the rural north of New York near Canada. These women each have a unique story of their own, but each tale revolves around their mother figure Marie. These women love and hate each other, and these emotions ebb and flow throughout the story. They do a great job of manipulating men, but not through sexual means. I could go on and on but I don’t want to spoil the book for you. The book is riveting and although I am not one for binge reading, I couldn’t put it down. —Barb (<https://www.bookish.com/articles/book...>)

Chantel McCray says

I feel so fortunate this novel came my way. I enjoyed it so much more than I anticipated. A multi-layered, elegantly written story of broken souls finding their way back home. A driving plot that will pull you in from the very first page and be impossible to put down until the last. Fascinating characters that will haunt you well after you finish reading the novel. *Echolocation* is one of only four titles that Engine Books publishes per year, so it may not be at your local bookstore, but the leg work it takes to seek it out will be well worth

the effort.

Ellen says

Fearless, elegant, and accessible, *Echolocation* is literary fiction at its best. With heartbreakingly beautiful prose, Myfanwy Collins tells a gripping and tender tale of broken souls yearning for wholeness. These are characters who will stay with you long after you turn the last page. It's a dazzling debut!

Sara Habein says

Echolocation is a perfect little book about reality hitting hard. It's about necessary roughness and begrudging tenderness, and it swallows one up while reading. I certainly look forward to experiencing more of Myfanwy Collins' work.

(My full review can be found at [Glorified Love Letters](#).)

Jen Knox says

Echolocation took me over so that I had to regroup whenever I stopped reading. The main characters are immediately visible and distinct, tough and believable. And their dynamic is revealed smoothly, with both momentum and surprise.

Collins' consistently highlights the macro--the landscape. There are many short but unforgettable passages that establish character: "She wanted to follow the path of her mother, but not so that she would find her; instead, she wanted to know what it felt like to be the one leaving," or create scenic exhibitions: "Gray trees along the roadside creaked in the wind, bare branches scratching out the blue from the sky. A single crow let out a continuous, ornery caw, rippling the morning's stillness."

This story never hiccups and never meanders. It paints a world that is at the same time believably tough and graciously beautiful. It is about connections and relationships and hardships and so much more. Oh, and the title is perfect.

Read it.

Tara says

This book surprised me. Didn't expect it to take the turns it did. I enjoyed Collins dipping into the soft thriller territory, with strong women and wonderful descriptions of the country just south of the Canadian border. I think Pia Ehrhardt said it best, it's about "women ... who slam back together and figure out how to live with what's missing."

Elizabeth says

11/18 Mcfanwy Collins:

Thank you for writing Echolocation. I treasure it. I can't find the words to express what I want to share with you right now.

11/17 Finished. I wish this book never had to end so I could read it forever.

RUN and find "Echolocation" by Myfanwy Collins, NOW! Everyone should read this author's work. Online at Amazon, B&N, and more. If you can't find it to purchase or in your library, I'll get it for you. It is "that" incredible!"

11/17

Note to Author: Mcfanwy,

How did you write this book? It is so multi-layered without being heavy, and has so many brilliant twists and turns that I've literally stopped at points, stared at the page, re-read what I'd read, my mouth forming perfectly round Os and I found myself silently mouthing, "No way! How can this be? Yes? Yes! This is really happening." My mind could not fathom or believe what I was feeling and processing. I had to shake my head, my eyes going round and BIG - Shock. Disbelief. But yes, what I'd read was what I'd really read.

WOW: You and Echolocation have made me feel just about every emotion I've ever felt. This ride and experience you've taken me on is beautiful, scary, ugly, magnificent, unimaginable but so viscerally real at the same time, and so much more.

Brilliant as the British might say and brilliant by definition of brilliant.

I had to pause in my reading to share my thoughts and feelings with you.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

11/17 Page 140

Talk about twists and turns. Totally unexpected. Incredible! Not many things creep up on me so stealthily when I read a book. There are now. WOW!

11/17 Page 120 "The weaving of characters and their relationships with their surroundings and nature is seamless and intricate. So much intimacy in every way on every page.

So full of soul, souls, and soul-full.

11/11

Note to Author:

I started reading Echolocation late last night. I have been literally 'feeling' every single one of your words. I can only read a few pages at a time because I become so utterly consumed and filled with emotion. I feel your characters inside me. They have become living, breathing, and feeling human beings to me. I know them somehow - they are me - they are special people in my life who I have known and who I know now. I'm crying writing to you. I don't know how to describe to anyone what you have created, who you are, or how anyone can possibly feel and write as you do. I don't know. I don't know.

I am totally caught up in the prose, how the writing just flows so naturally. I'm inescapably filled with emotions. Characters are completely real human beings to me. I feel everything they are feeling. I'm reading this book but the characters have emerged from the pages and I feel that they are alive and living in our world. I'm tense, and moved, and speechless. They are already part of me.

Katrina says

Be prepared. Haunting, mesmerizing, "Echolocation" is a page-turner you will not be able to put down until you've reached the end. It's the story of four women connected by family and the bleak, harsh, land of northern New York. Some have escaped, but they're all brought together again by tragedy and secrets they thought they'd left behind. There's Auntie Marie, dying of cancer, the two girls she raised, Geneva and Cheri, and Renee, Cheri's mother, who ran away to Florida not long after Cheri was born. Cheri returns to help Geneva with their aunt, and Renee shows up unexpectedly with a secret that will change them all.

The characters in "Echolocation," men and women alike, are flawed in the best, most fascinating, ways, and though they make mistakes, they are not beyond redemption, not beyond our empathy. Collins clearly loves her characters, weaknesses and all, and that authorial love elicits a similar compassion from the reader. These four women are fierce. Auntie Marie's devotion to Cheri and Geneva is as strong as her devotion to God; Cheri is determined in her self-destructive desire to deny her feelings; Geneva's strength in carrying on with life after a devastating accident is remarkable, and Renee finally discovers she's capable of caring for another more than herself.

This is a complex story, told with an assured, deft hand. Collins is a master at weaving story lines together in an artful, spare way. Every word is well-chosen. Every nuance is perfectly placed. "Echolocation" is literary fiction at its finest.

Bonnie ZoBell says

Myfanwy Collin's Haunting New Novel, ECHOLOCATION

The women in Myfanwy Collins' breath-taking debut novel haven't had an easy time of it. In Echolocation, published by Engine Books, the beautiful and haunting Geneva loses an arm when a saw kicks back and cuts

through her forearm. She lives only because of her tenacity; despite the gushing blood, despite being in shock, she ties a tourniquet with her teeth, rushes to the truck, and drives, at least until she runs out of gas. Then an unusual man riding his ATV, a mysterious man deftly characterized soon enough, discovers her on the road and gets her to a clinic. Geneva is forever flawed when the arm can't be saved. Her husband Clint feels so bad that he couldn't prevent the accident that he goes to the town undertaker and buys a top-of-the-line baby casket for the arm, "white, silver-handled, with pink silk interior." They proceed to have a graveside service led by Father O'Connor. And, yes, with her stunning use of language and her literary prowess with the grotesque, Myfanwy should definitely be compared to Flannery.

As girls, Geneva and Cheri's life together is as intertwined and mostly fun-loving as sisters. They're raised by Auntie Marie in a "border town state in upstate New York, seven miles from Canada." The area is home for adults waiting to die and youngsters waiting to leave. "Auntie Marie owned a store-cum-gas station." When Geneva marries Clint, all Cheri can say is, "He's a pig," and immediately the girls stop being so congenial. Cheri gets herself out of Dodge and goes on with her life, such as it is, sleeping with drunkards and generally not taking care of herself.

Auntie Marie is dying, so the girls are returning home to the only mother figure they've ever known, though Marie is neither Geneva's nor Cheri's birth mother. Geneva was a foster child placed with Auntie Marie, a foster child whose parents seemingly forgot to come back and get her. Cheri's mother, Renee, left her baby girl with Auntie Marie and ran off with her newest boyfriend at the time to Florida. When Renee doesn't come back, Auntie suggests it'll be good for Cheri to stay on so she can finish her school year. When the years continue to creep by and Cheri's mother still doesn't return and no one mentions a thing about it, Cheri figures she'll be staying on permanently.

It is a testament to Myfanwy Collins' well-known lyricism, the depth of her characters and plot, that she is able so artfully to bring together these lives, the past, the present, and hints of the future of these three women who have been given so little to start out with in the way of love and intimacy.

And this isn't even including the misfit men who work their way into this quirky tale. There's the new man in one-armed Geneva's life that so idealizes her he'll kill. Cheri's mother Renee turns up out of nowhere with her newest new man in her life, one so chilling and violent you can't stop reading because you want to find out whether what he ends up doing is not irreversible.

Can these women live in the same house together again? Will Auntie Marie make it? What happens when yet another baby girl without parents arrives at the house with a strange new mother figure?

Lucky you, if you haven't read this book yet! What a beautiful story you have ahead of you!

Kevin Fanning says

So, OK. This was not at all the book I was expecting it to be. And I love to be surprised, so I mean that as the highest complement.

What you gather from the back cover and the first couple of chapters is that this is a book about a complicated family dynamic. Two sort-of sisters with a lot of distance between them (Cheri & Geneva) come back together when Aunt Marie, the woman who raised them, dies. And as if they didn't have enough

problems of their own, Cheri's absentee mother Renee then comes flying back towards them with secrets and problems of her own.

Given all that I was expecting a novel about these three women struggling and learning to love and forgive and accept each other after a lot of hurt and a lot of distance. Which, I mean, sounds like a good book! Kind of Oprah-ish, but good.

But this is soooo not an Oprah book. Myf's prose is really quiet and lovely and full of these small beautiful moments. But the story is not quiet and lovely. It is dark and violent and scary. THINGS HAPPEN and keep happening and it all unfolds shockingly quick, like an arm being torn off by a chainsaw.

Like the title suggests, it is about people trying to find their way in the darkness. Hurling towards walls that they might not see in time to steer clear of, but not letting that knowledge slow them down.

Saying much more would give too much away, but it's not a book that hands things over tidily. It is true to life and true to its characters. Families can be messy and complicated because lives are messy and complicated, and this book doesn't sugarcoat it or pat it down. It really stuck with me, I was chewing over the ending for the rest of the day, so "haunting" seems like the right word for it. Loved it.

Evan says

ECHOLOCATION by Myfanwy Collins has me thinking about fission. At first I thought of the collapsing of the universe, but, without giving away too many spoilers, this is more about the collision of distinct, related women and the resulting release of energy. There is destruction and creation in the series of events. Examples of gain from loss begin in the opening pages when Geneva (the main character and the most morally compelling) loses her arm but gains freedom.

I think the greatest momentum in the novel is created by the consistent PRESENCE of the PAST. This particular aspect of the novel reminds me of Alice Munro, whose characters seem like mental time travelers, moving between now and then. Collins juggles Renee, Cheri, and Geneva and I'm curious what she'd be able to do with just one character put under the microscope of her sentences.

The closing ~30 pages is quite interesting as it reveals more memories than I expected from the climax of the novel, cementing Geneva as the emotional core of the novel, the potentially tragic figure, and the one who still lingers after I've shut the book.

Pamela says

This short novel is, unusually, centered on a quartet of women: Geneva and Cheri, two foster children; Marie, the woman who takes them in; and Renee, Cheri's mother, a good-time girl who justifies her abandonment of Cheri by deciding the girl is better off without her (she may be right). There are men in this tale, but their stories seem refreshingly tangential even as their impulsive actions shape the women's lives. These are women who need men, sometimes to excess, and yet who never allow men to be their destinies.

The death of Marie, when Geneva and Cheri are in their twenties, launches the narrative, which builds to a dramatic confrontation in the remote town on the Canadian-U.S. border where Marie tried, against the odds, to build an orderly existence for those she loved.

There's really a fifth female here: an infant who comes into the story in a surprising way and who embodies both the hope that these rough-ridden women are still capable of and the fragility of love in their world. In fact, I'll add a sixth: Nature. Myfanwy Collins is masterful at evoking landscape, particularly the harsh winter landscape of way-upstate New York. This novel's emotional and physical weather are much the same: scouring, unpredictable, and dangerous. Echolocation casts a spell and leaves you shaken.

Holly Robinson says

Echolocation is a tense, dreamlike novel that gets you in its grip and won't let go. Set in the forgotten reaches of upper New York State, the story's characters are all fierce misfits, yet somehow Myfanwy Collins manages to make each of them sympathetic characters whose fates we want to follow. You might think the plot, with its murder, suicide, and fleeing women, would be nightmarish, but there is a sly darkly comic tone, and the interplay between past and present in the chronology makes this short novel entertaining and complex rather than brutish. Indeed, by the book's end, you come away believing that salvation is possible even for the most misguided among us. The language sings throughout the book.
