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Round Robin

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Cover Page Footnote

*This piece was created during the workshop as a writing exercise. The prompt for this exercise: everyone begin a story. After ten minutes, pass the story to the next person. Continue the new story. The authors in this case indicate who began; the brackets indicate where the writers switched.

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The prompt for this exercise: everyone begin a story. After ten minutes, pass the story to the next person. Continue the new story. The authors in this case indicate who began; the brackets indicate where the writers switched.

Lily Anderson

<I stood over the blue blue ocean, surveying the rocks tumbling into piles near the shore. The smooth marble under my feet cooled them, as I paced the porch lazily- taking in the vast sky, trees, and bay. All blended shades of grey and blue, green treetops reaching out side to side. Other villas dotting the coast. Above and below, it seems the landscape spins and connects in one circle. Every color has a twin, each cloud a reflection on the water. A warm breeze carried a strange scent on it- I turned to Mount Vesuvius to see a strange cloud growing larger and larger atop the peak. It seemed to be propelled higher and higher with subsequent blasts- like a great trunk with branches ever expanding. My mother and uncle rushed out at the distant booms being carried over the water. My uncle and I climbed quickly to the villa roof as ash and dirt began pouring down the hillside.>

<Time froze. I could not believe the calamitous inferno of liquid rock roaring towards me was reality. Disbelief. Utter disbelief, paralyzing shock, the tranquil ocean and bucolic ocean of just moments before was a different world that had just shattered behind me.

If time had momentarily frozen, fiery contents quickly began thawing it, and in another few moments it was boiling hot as ever, and was evaporating before I could catch it.

Run! The commotion began. By now the bursts of smoke and ash were unfurling to impossibly large tracts of sky, and as commotion erupted on the hillside in front of me, a dark shadow chased over us, swallowing the sun. Villagers, neighbors, women, children, all were fleeing to the high ground on the North of town. (30 seconds have passed...)>

<Now, I can detect features in the onrushing wave of soot, its kindling forming hateful eyes, vampire bat nostrils, a maw that

seemed to have been slashed open with a knife. The monstrous face is not exactly gleeful, no it appears dazed like me, like a mammal on drugs, not realizing the full weight of its actions. It tries to tell me something, but it can't speak except to channel the roar of the cloud, although it seems to desperately want to break through its own stupor. All this occurs in less than a blink, yet I am learning to intuit a new language. I just can't quite learn this fiery tongue in the time I have left before it swallows me.>

<And then there is a tug as the all consuming darkness threatens to come and swallow what is left of the colors in my memory and the shapes in the dust. It pulls hard, taking with it the rest of my body that was frozen in the face of the incorrigible shifting soot. It drags me away from my nightmare and into another dream, of adrenaline and panicked breaths. My heart beats with all the force of life left in me, of the years I thought were promised to me. It pushes me forward into a consciousness of the moment which I knew I should fear might slip away from my fingertips as the demons in the soot claw to drag me back. My hands clutch at the uneven clay of the roof, the roughness more real to my skin than the stinging of the ash. The blacks and greys continue to rush past me to chase away the blues and greens of our countryside. I feel the branch before I recognize it, most of the tree must be burning by now.>

Katie Carithers

<She said she fell in love with the moon. With the way it changed and it altered, the way it slipped into the night sky without so much as a word and hung there. Beautiful. Still. Stealing the breath and glances of observers. The shouts of children whose eyes reflected back mirrors of the yellow orb in the depth of their irises, black pools overcast in the shadow of the night. The laughter of lovers, who, cloaked in her silvery shadow, reached for one another in the dewy grass. And the call of the wolves, who raced and

awakened in her presence, crying out for one another, to the world to say that the forest was alive. And of her, who sat there on the beach, her fingers and toes curling into the sand, listening to the lap of the lake. Contemplating the moonlight, and how the wind disturbed the reflection in the water.

She said she never cared that it shone out the stars some nights that they winked out from her anyway during the day. But the moon, sometimes she could see her, a ghostly shadow of herself printed against an awakening sky. Against all odds, constant, unmovable.

And so I loved her as she spoke.>

<They say if you love something, let it go. And so I spent my nights alone, curled between soft cotton sheets while her side of the bed remained cold, while she danced in the night-dewed grass and laughed on the nights she was too overcome to lie in dreams with either of her lovers, not that glowing celestial being which was always there to wrap her in its silky comforting glow, and not me.

But if her true love was the moon, she was the Sun, always chasing and chasing, pulling everything around her into orbit and giving it life, and I was no exception.> <Like a new bud on a tree or a fresh mossy tendril slowly opening in the spring, so too had I opened in the warmth of her presence. The depths of my winter were no match for her unwavering radiance.

And so I loved her as she spoke.

I stretched out in the sunny grass, wondering when she would return. Her orbit brought her nearer and then farther away, in perpetuity. I sought out warmth where I could find it, but nothing could compare to the true brightness that I had known, and would know again when she had worn herself out by dancing for the moon night and night again.>

Logan Thrasher Collins

<Acrobatic gizmos are leaping in the jungle, hollering like little iron monkeys. Some are tripods, other icosapods, still others have partial> <parasites that whirl and dazzle in their own trifecta of colonies. Their imperfections of proteins swirling in a cytochrome of chaos that neither you nor I can see. The organelles of such destruction release a respiration of acids not oxygen, collecting in the fibers of the being. Not scaring, just soring, pooling in the organisms that race and race against a biological glitch in the software, a self-destruct button that they never pressed, sending electric signals that bounce> <back and forth and back and forth and back and forth again but forth into what? Forthright forward motion into the blitzkrieg blackness of overwrought and underwoven fabric of space and time mixing metaphors and maintaining motion because we do not understand, were not programmed to understand, synapses snap and crackle and the brain folds in on itself once, ten times, no times at all because that's all the higher the flesh computers can count working in their silly simple system of naughts and ones.

Pity them; they take their time bound refuge in constellation contemplations of which they have no proof unfounded accusations provide provisional solace when the knowing is worse than the naught. And the knot's all tied up at zero all because when everyone loses and licentious tears run down their faces streaming screaming fleeing from the scene there is nobody left unscathed enough to win and the acid-track tear stains scar their shame forever.> <Jungle jumpers twist and turn through time, searing like acid and fearing the masses. One hundred thousand million billion trillion stars in the everlasting and ever-expanding sky that pulses as part of a galactic growth that no being wrought from the hands of a being wrought from atoms will ever comprehend. Not the creators. Not the hideous offspring>

<The sun sets over the sea, reflection bleeding across the waves. The girl squints reflexively. More time has passed than she realized.

“What do you want me to say?” she yells as loudly as she can, unsure there is anyone willing to listen. The girl has angered the Mother before, but She had never before acted so childish. The girl wonders if She was actually getting younger, or if the girl herself was simply getting older. The girl almost wonders if she had the potential somehow to become equal with the Mother, but she banishes such a dangerous thought quickly. If the Mother is not listening to her voice, She is probably not listening to her thoughts either, but the girl knows it is wiser to be safe rather than sorry. The silent treatment is not the worst punishment the Mother is capable of enacting.

The girl does know what it is the Mother wants her to say.>
<She turns her gaze back to the setting sun, clearing her mind as she has so many times in the past. The gray spots in her eyes wiggle into focus like they do every time she stares at the sun- a bad habit, she tells herself. This time she feels the Mother enter her thoughts- a cold presence, like ice sliding down the inside of her skull. *Turn your eyes from the sun. Look at me.* The girl knows that time is running out for this test. She turns back to the Mother and knows what she must do. Although the Mother will certainly be displeased, the girl is ready to demonstrate her strength. Maintaining eye contact, she walks slowly backwards off of the boat, plunging into the cold water. The last sensation she has is the cold presence in her mind glowing red with anger.

The next morning, she woke up in bed. Her Brothers and Sisters were all around her, each having awakened simultaneously, ready for the day. They all made their beds and awaited the Mother.> <The red fingered dawn reaches out to the stoic hut on the sea shore, and as the Mother calls the Family to their first duty

of the day, the cold air begins its momentary ascent to midday heat. They shiver as they step across the coarse sea grass to where the mother stands atop the knoll to the northwest, still shrouded by the dark sky and ocean blending behind her.

The Mother is different from yesterday's Mother. Another spectre in the constant cycle that is Life, this crazy journey. But together the family knows that there is a constant character to be found in the mother, a unity beyond all difference, a universal Truth that binds each iteration together. It is this for which They are searching.

The girl thinks of this, and it gives her strength to face the day.

Wrapped in rough woolen shawls, the girl assesses the landscape around her. The little hut and the sea always remain the same, but every day there is something new about the land around the hut.

Finally, it began.>