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Round Robin

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Round Robin

Cover Page Footnote

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

Round Robin

The prompt for this exercise: everyone begin a story. After twelve 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.

Kevin Donohue

<I.

And he rubs his wedding ring
On and off
And he tries to feel something
Sound and soft

And he dreams of the night
Ago and away
Her head turned to the light
Aglow and amazed

As the sun ran to the sea
Twenty-five
At his parents' house in Tennessee>
<The sun in its dive

Her hair like red silk
In its sweep
And tea and milk.
Yellowed sheep

On the opposite hill
In the dew
Wandering meekly until
The patches of yew

And the sun in the morning
And the sun in the day
And his mother, poor thing,
With nothing to say.

And the world all aglow.
A caress
At a firework show.
And yes,

Soon,

to be home in a lull,
In an emptying room,

Where her hair is as dull
As the dullening gloom

With the sun somewhere else
All an ocean away
And the lamplight just melts
And there's nothing to say.

II.

January 7th

Today I thought of the sea in Tennessee. Tennessee. Tennis. Tennis and tea and Tess and Tea. I wonder how I never realized it before.

January 19th

Birthday. Gray. Birthgray.

February 2nd

Tired of Poe. Tired tired tired tired and my fingers have gotten too thin and I've had to stop wearing the thing entirely.>

<March 13th

I think I remember that the words used to flow, stumbling and tripping over themselves to leave my pen, my brain caught up in the linguistic undertow, waves carrying me away until I could wave goodbye to the tsunami torn wreckage of my mind.

March 30th

She called today. I heard the phone ring. Ring and ring and ring but I don't hear it see it think it feel it anymore. It's in a drawer.

Summer

Can't bother to check the date. Memphis awaits.

September 1st

New month new job new town new me. This thing's an old resolution but change is coming I'm looking for a revolution.

On bended knee I'd beg for absolution.

It's convoluted.

My relationship with getting down on one knee.>

Zea Eanet

<In the afternoons, the sun gleams like wet plaster on the polished edges of the deck chairs, turning the whole backyard into some kind of sculpture studio, or maybe a construction site. On the water, on the trees, in the lines of the faded clothing hanging on the edges of the porch gate, the light takes on new colors, filtering through rather than glancing off like hard pieces of vitriolic hail. On the white plastic chairs, and the dirty gray tables, though, everything is white, like

snow in the mornings of the days when I got sunburns under my chin while skiing in the Alps with my parents. In the summers the glare gets underneath my eyelids, filtering into my vision and back out through the skin, leaving behind a kind of bruised pink color that is impossible to escape except under the heavy press of a towel, or the oppressive spinning coolness of the inside of the house.

I long for rain on these summer days, for a wet cloud that absorbs dry malaise up into the sky the way the desert throbs down after an unexpected sunshower, for a game of tennis. A game of tennis in the afternoon on a court so matte that it looks like a painting in a perfect gallery where the overhead lights do not seem to exist at all, a window into a place where every color is pristinely manufactured and yet real and the sun only makes yellow and blue and red and cannot hurt the eyes.

The evening is better. On this particular day which I am remembering my father came home early from his meetings because the authors had failed to show, and it was stuffy in the bookshop and an unbearable Thursday. He poured himself a glass of white wine, went outside to the deck, and after a few moments came back in with an empty glass and the beginnings of a heat headache. I was on my stomach on the tile in the kitchen, feeling the coolness of the ceramic leach up into one hot cheek for sixty seconds before shifting six inches over and turning my head onto new territory. I had been reading but hadn't done well and had left my book on its face on a table in the other room. From my cottony brain I heard my father pick it up, smooth through its pages, and replace it almost silently on the table. I'm sure he thought I was asleep.

In the office he encountered my mother, who I knew had been trying to work all day. She told him she was not pleased that he was back earlier than she had expected from town but I could tell that she was lying, that she hadn't been able to get anything done all day and that she was relieved to finally have someone who wasn't fifteen and overwhelmed with self-obsession to talk to. I could hear it in her smile, the squeak of her chair on the light wood. I thought about shifting once more but must not have made it.>

<It's strange that what I remember most are the colors. The brightness, the contrast, even in the deadest part of summer. I can't picture the grass specifically, but I'm sure it was dry and brown, as it always is in the summer droughts. But when I close my eyes, all I see is rainbow vivacity. I wish I could trust my brain.

The doctors told my parents that first seizure was probably triggered by the heat. When I came home from the hospital we had a brand new air conditioning unit fogging up the windows. I drew pictures in the condensation sometimes, transparent versus opaque instead of black and white.

My dad read to me— stories, poetry, stuff I hadn't touched since I was a kid— while I leaned my head against the cool and vaguely damp window. My mom started coming out of her office with worried lines etched in her forehead, brows drawn low. She'd listen to a few minutes of Harry Potter, laugh or gasp or sigh or just relax, muscle by muscle, until she wound up draped over the back of my dad's chair, a different kind of picturesque.

Of course, your brain frying itself with electricity on a weekly or monthly or daily basis isn't really good for it.> <I was five, in the grocery store, the first time. The air conditioning sucked, and it was suffocating in that store. I got flashes in front of my eyes, my limbs trembled, sparks flew between my ears. I remember in the vegetable aisle I collapsed. I remember the carrots. They had placed the carrots squarely with all the other green vegetables, just an orange stroke in between all the cabbage and celery, chives and okra, lettuce and snap peas. My mother told me when I woke in the hospital bed I asked where the carrots had gone.

The evening wears on. I head up to my bedroom as the sun goes down, that summer red, that summer yellow, that carrot orange with me again.>

Madeleine Waters

<It's a certain kind of privilege to see the world before dawn. Something you have to earn. You have to put in the forethought of setting an alarm, the effort of getting out of bed. You have to be alert enough on three hours of sleep to not trip down the stairs and wake up the entire rest of your family when you slip and fall and swear because Dad never gets around to carpeting them even though he's been saying he will for longer than you can remember.

So, yeah, it's some work. It's really kind of a pain, actually, but it's worth it. There's all sorts of things you only see at the fringes of the night, when the sky is halfway to waking up but the sun's still below the horizon. It's practical—by far the best time of day to collect dew drops and nightshade and a hundred other potions ingredients—but it's also completely magical. The sun makes everything wake up in a way your best reanimation spell could never hope to imitate.

Midnight is overrated. The moon is beautiful, she's powerful, but as an icon. An archetype. Magic is fluid, dynamic, changing to fill the volume of its container, only it can never be contained. It comes from the in-between places performed by in-between people and for that you need the in-between times. You don't even know the word for it. Twilight comes after sunset, but no one's ever named the dawn.> <No one quite knows twilight's hidden brother, his steady hands turning back his sibling's darkling machinations. He works in secret, as do I.

The rusted iron crackles as the porch door swings open, and you catch it—must not wake anyone. Mom's a light sleeper, and never approved of your “corrupting experimentations” anyway. No need for her to know. You follow the dirt road past the mailbox and down the hill, and veer off to the right,> <where the ground slips away into a deep dust bowl. The skid of your feet on the yielding ground makes you think of that old song, a hum between moments of the night. You have a sense that something around you is moving in rhythm.

The plants that grow here are not appropriate for your purposes. Too strong, too woody. The earth gestures towards the edge of a lapping pool, pulling you along with a soft desire to where the things are green and young. They spring back beneath your footsteps, lighter than a moonwalker's, lighter than a cloud's, for this is the time when your magic has begun to pour out of you in traces that lift you up and spread your mind out far beyond the reaches of the flesh. They spring back under your feet but they break with a sigh between your fingers, and they cluster your basket with such defeated grace.

The dawn is here. It announces its presence by prodding at the drowsing birds, who begin to sing with a kind of masked terror, like the talent-show contestant stricken with stage fright. Their desperate liveliness invigorates you. They are the soul of the forest, and you are merely trimming it.

Stepping into the pool is an inspired idea, but not one of your most carefully considered. You have forgotten to take your shoes off, and they are your quietest pair. Perhaps by the next moon you will invent a carpeting spell so Dad can finally relax and admit that his back quit a few years ago and the living room stairs are best left a project for the younger generation.

The water is warm. Eddies of glimmering mud twist around your ankles with an insolence you do not feel is warranted. With a tilt of your head the water is flat and clear once more around your skin and socks, your half-grown calf hairs, your silver anklet.>