

MICRO

ROUND

ROBIN

ZINE

**Every 100 words is another author.*

***Every 300 words is a new story.*

He wanted to scream, but if he opened his mouth then they could both drown. His eyes were burning. His nose stung. The water roared in his ears. Ahead, the raft was tossed and swallowed by the raging river. His brother was clinging to him. Their cold, slippery arms were locked together tightly. It hurt. The cold was eating into them both. The log, wedged between the rocks, was slowly beginning to shift. His body was trapped but his mind was faraway. He thought about yesterday and all the things he had done and said. He thought about his father. Dad and his last will. Which he fulfilled, even though he didn't want to... Dad and his recommendations: "Hold on to each other." had been the last one. Accurate, yet so useless. He wanted to cry, but he was in charge now, had no time for that. A rope splashing next to them broke his thoughts. Rich was grabbing it already. So calm and

courageous in face of recent events, at 8; he admired his little brother. Their savior was a girl, about his age. Gesturing them to silence, she pointed towards the woods: shadows among shadows, They were there. Glowing eyes flashed like fireflies between the gaps in the trees. The girl pulled Rich up and onto level ground, opposite the menacing onlookers. As soon as the rope was free of little hands, it was cast back out into the water, reaching for the remaining boy. His eyes never left the woods as he got purchase on the lifeline thrown to him. The fear that if he looked away they would be closer at a second glance consumed him. With both boys' feet on stable ground the girl took one last look into the woods at the shadows that stirred and lingered, as if to stand her ground. Finally she grabbed the boys' wrists, one in each hand, and ran.

There was a burrito in the fridge, but she didn't remember where it came from or the last time she had ordered out. It was just there in the back with a thin layer of freezer burn. There was nothing else there except a bottle of red hot sauce and other condiments (such as relish) that wouldn't taste good on a mystery burrito. She placed it in the microwave and nuked it for three and a half minutes. She doused it with sauce. After the first bite, she noticed there was a cat in her house. She owned no cat. Meow! That was only the beginning. Her internal thoughts changed from curiosity to full blown confusion. She didn't own cats. Plural. Upon leaving her kitchen and turning the corner, she spotted three cats then eight more cats. They scampered down the hall with saluting tails to greet her and her burrito. There were striped cats with white gloves for paws, there were black tuxedoed cats with

yellow eyes, there were spotted cats, fluffy cats, cats were everywhere. "OH GOD!" She stood on her couch surrounded. Every square inch of her apartment had not one but at least two felines per. Where were they coming from? In her desperation she looked out and noticed smoke. Flames. There was fire. The building across the street was on fire and firemen were dropping off rescued cats from the shelter through her window. One looked at her in the eye and apologized crisply. "I'm very sorry m'am." Another armful of cats was released into her living room. She felt a rumble in her nervous stomach. It was urgent. She threw the burrito onto the bare part of the hardwood floor, let the cats swarm over it, clearing a path. She ran into the bathroom.

This flat was best described as a dump, with a ...couch in the middle of it all. And slouching on it, in what might have been a green pajama someday, impervious to the outside world, her client: a runner. She instantly disliked him, thinking that if her 1000 eurobucks suit came to be ruined in here, no matter the wages, she would reap his head off. "I'm hungry." he moaned, pulling off the cranial jacks, emerging into reality. His voice was softer than she expected. "Pizza?" he proposed. She quickly ordered two full C2 menus at her usual delivery service. Then was a knock at the door. She checked the screen above her door lock. The camera pointed down at a delivery man with a pizza box. She wanted to be suspicious but dismissed it. The door slid open. "That was fast. Should I expect future deliveries to arrive like this?" The delivery man opened the box with anti-static gloves, handed

her the two pizza chips inside, explaining, "Someone canceled their order." "Oh?" "After they self-destruct please recycle the e-waste responsibly. Have a wonderful day." He left promptly. She inserted a chip into her client's spinal slot. He threw up. The client began convulsing on the ground. His soft voice began to cry out in an anguished scream. Ares, with all of her training could only look in horror as her client's implants began to heat up, and blister. Her client's cybernetic eyes were starting to melt. The plastics bubbling, and losing their viscosity. His cerebral implants were making loud snapping noises as the heat began to fracture his vertebrae. His death was painful, but mercifully quick. Ares looked down at the still smoking corpse. "Well, I guess it's time I got to work."

It took a lot to be able to look them in the eyes again. It had been years, but the pain in my chest still felt days new and it was unfair that they stood here in front of me as if nothing had happened. "I missed you," with a sympathetic smile playing on their face. The words hurt. The implication that I was to agree and act like it was all a dream just to be close again hurt more. I don't think I can recover a second time. In a heartbeat I'm forced to say what I've rehearsed a thousand times. "You miss who I used to be. It's been so long that we're practically strangers now." It's not a joke but I don't want them to doubt. Smiling, laughing lightly, I fought the urge to bite my lips, to scrunch my brow. I wanted my expression to be nonchalant, even triumphant. There were many things I wanted to tell them. They were dying inside of me because I had decided to maintain my composure. "So-o, how

have you been?" They falter a little. I don't know if it's because of social awkwardness or the regret for making small talk. I want to believe that they are caught off guard. Maybe they were sorry. Maybe they felt sorry for me. I hate it. I refuse to dream while this is really happening. That I get to see them in person one more time. "Mm, I'm good. I've just been living life, you know?" "Yeah, I get that. Me too." They had nothing to offer me so at their turn they ordered coffee and waited at the pick up counter, while scrolling through their phone. I was sick. I wanted to leave so I took a muffin and left.

When the waves washed away we were left with little. Little to hope for, little to understand, yet also little to fear. Once everything else is gone, what else could we possibly lose? And so we rebuilt as our ancestors had before and theirs before them. After wars after famine and disease and disaster, some spark is still left to ignite anew. "Grandma?" little Henry broke me from my reverie. "No, little one, I don't think we'll see your parents again." After months of hard work and struggle, things began to resemble some form of normalcy. Ruins still surrounded us, but we were doing our best. Getting somewhere. Wildlife around us began to flourish again, too, overtime and there was one thing for certain that everyone understood on our island: when our people fall, they will continue to rise up again and again. I spent my time telling the

stories of our people to the children like Henry. So that they might remember that their families as a part of the never ending circle of life that they must persist in. I pause to look at my hands sometimes. They are gnarled and wrinkled like the thick roots of a tree. Then change my grip on the shovel. I have to continue digging. The seas have finished rising but there is no time to waste. Together with the rest of the colony, we have built tunnels going in and out of mountains. We have dug up and replanted every plant we found to be closer to the lakes and rivers. We built shelters for all exposed to the relentless heat, the unforgiving sun, and to prepare. We might not have to die. I want to prepare for a future no matter how bleak or how futile while I yet live.

"My dear lady, care for a dance?" "Why certainly, my dear knight." The two of them danced upon the abandoned train car, the moon shown down upon them. One's dress, regal and gilded, glittered wavering with the light. The other's armor, her dented chest plate reflected the moon's gaze upon her lover's face. A waltz fit for two. "Quite the lovely night for a dance." The lady asked. "Most certainly, my dear lady." The knight replied. "And yet, we most certainly not survive tomorrow's." "Then let us dance for tonight, for us." And so, the two danced, only for themselves. By morning, the lady had donned the knight's armor. The knight had donned the lady's dress and glittering bridal veil. The rising sun cast a blinding white light across the vacant, war torn land. Stoic, the knight bid her love good bye from the castle balcony. Below, the lady mounted a horse decorated with flags, and rode

at full gallop towards the battlefield, gritting her teeth and weeping. She would rather die than be married to someone she did not love and so, the two of them designed this plan. If they survived this, they could rule two kingdoms together. The wedding commenced at the mid part of the day where nothing but the bride's face was hidden. No one suspected that the princess was not herself, that she was actually far away, leading armies. The attack was at sunset when the shadows were at their heaviest. Sharp rays of the piercing sun shielded them. The princess, wearing a general's armor, was at the front charging with all her soldiers with their spears beside her. The king rode at the behind. Soldiers live for their kings, after all. The first enemy she killed, she cried out in anguish. Why, war?

The Micro Round Robin Zine is a flash fiction anthology zine with written works in the style of an exquisite corpse. We hope you enjoyed it!

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