

nkwell

Literary Magazine



reversal:

an act or the process of reversing a change as of fortune or for the worse

Introduction

Inkwell Literary Magazine is proud to present our first issue. Our writers are excited to share their latest works with you.

Our literary theme is reversal: an act or the process of reversing; a change (as of fortune) often for the worse.

With riches to rags stories, knights with garbage can shields, and remembrances of rolled up sleeves, enjoy our writers' musings on what reversal means to them. Whether it be poetry or prose, fiction or non-fiction, every work is from the heart and aims to show you the rose rising from the ashes, the beauty coming alongside the pain.

We hope you find encouragement in the knowledge of reversal and the courage to continue through whatever capsizing, recalling, turning situation you face.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." - Romans 8:28 KJV

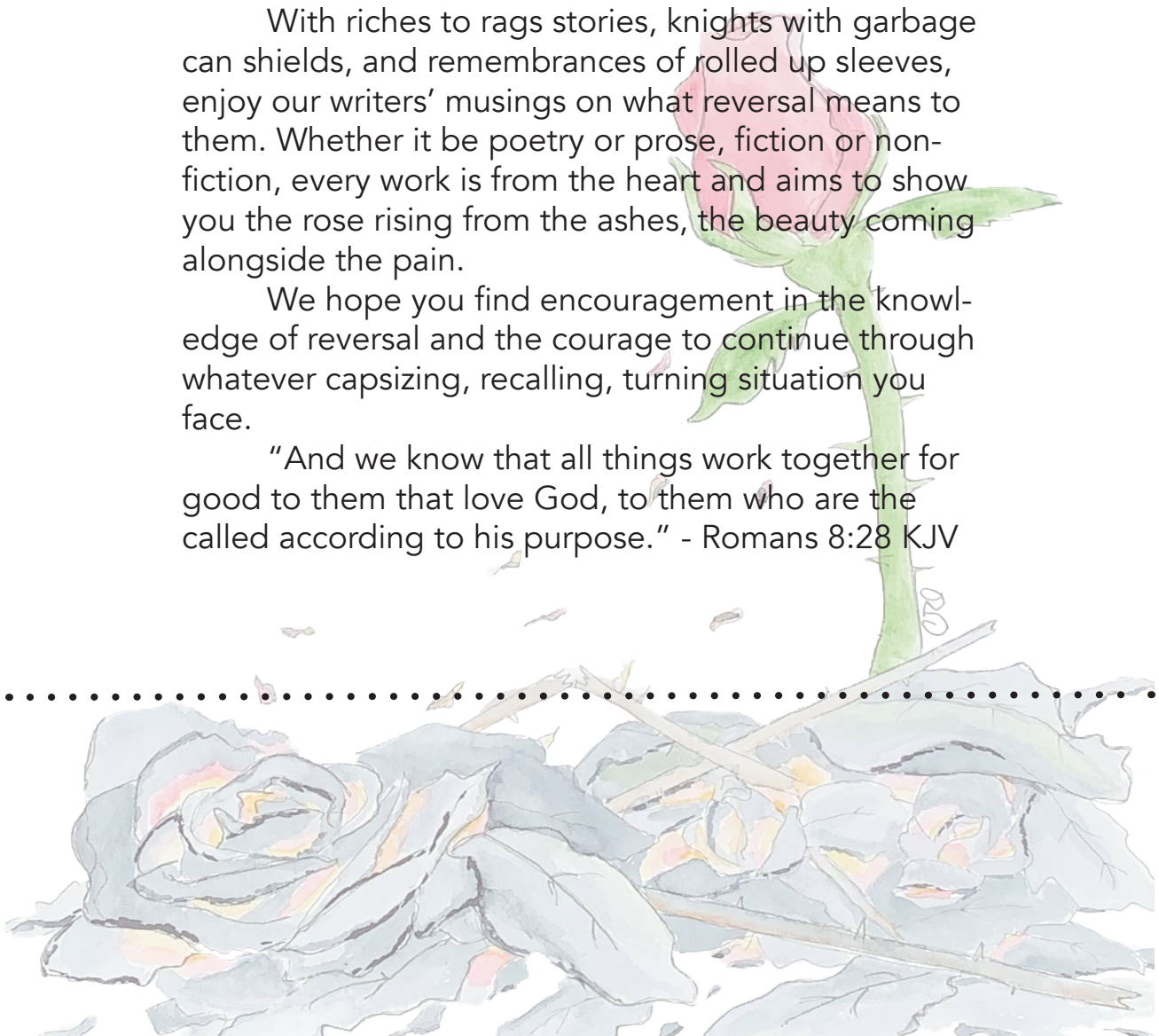




Table of Contents

Creative Nonfiction

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Arranoitz | Kaleb Shelton, pg. 2 |
| 2. The Cowardly Knight and Red Feather Duster | Katelyn Lain, pg. 3 |

Short Stories

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3. Bears in These Parts | Jessi Skrade, pg. 4 |
| 4. A Gentleman | Kathleen Coyle, pg. 7 |

Poems

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5. Meditations on the Sun's Return | Seth Farmer, pg. 11 |
| 6. Crow | Vicki Olachea, pg. 12 |
| 7. LasreveR | Sarah Kanoun, pg. 12 |
| 8. Antonia | Abril Brito Mones, pg. 13 |
| 9. You Hate Your Smile | Meredith Thomas, pg. 14 |
| 10. If Only I Could Walk at Night | Olivia Thomas, pg. 15 |



Arranoitz

By Kaleb Shelton

Have you ever been to a place that just puts you in awe? Often places that take our breath away involve God's lovely nature. Tall, majestic mountains; sparkling, shining waterfalls; panoramic views from high cliffs; and mighty forests of gigantic trees are a few of these. But sometimes, it's not the magnificent, almost intimidating places that command your respect for God and his creation, but the smaller, more peaceful settings. One example that comes to my mind is Mount Arranoitz in Zegama, Spain.

I first climbed this little mountain in December of 2016 at a Teen Retreat at an old, rustic farmhouse. Arranoitz is not even 900 meters tall, so you can easily see the peak from the bottom. If you stand in front of the farmhouse and crane your neck well enough, you will see some rocky crags jutting out from a clear space at the top of the mountain. The rocks look like jagged teeth, or maybe a fleet of dolphin's fins. That mysterious grey crown of granite is the goal that makes the hike worthwhile. In December, it is sometimes still quite warm in that region, making puffy winter coats unnecessary. Sometimes the sun will shine too. This short win-

dow of time between the torrents of autumn's rainfalls and the invasion of winter's white forces provides a perfect opportunity to ascend to the peak.

Most of the time, you are hiking on a seldomly used path in the wooded hillside. Clear puddles on the path - remains of November's rain or snow falls - are densely populated with frogs' eggs, which look like hundreds of little eyes staring at you inquisitively but fearlessly. You occasionally pass the quiet, ancient stone remains of century-old farmhouses or walls. When you see those crude stones stacked on top of each other, not even a foot high, you stop to wonder who used to live there. I personally picture an old Basque shepherd, leaning on his staff as his wrinkled face peers out from under his wide-brimmed hat.

All vegetation, from scrubby little bushes to the dark green, red-speckled holly bushes to the tall pines, is prickly and unpleasant to the touch, but this only increases the sense that you are in a place not many other people visit. Finally, you leave the faint path and hike starkly uphill, grasping branch and bush to steady yourself as you go.

But at last, you reach the open spot that you could see down at the farmhouse. It is quite steep, and the going is very slow because you become short of breath, but you never realize how "breathtaking" the hike is until you reach the top, like I did.

Standing on the rocks and scanning the horizon, I saw why it was worth it. As I stood there, my lungs stinging from the exertion and a cool breeze brushing my face, I started to get a better picture of what the Basque region of Spain is like. Behind me, a little beyond a fenced-in cow pasture, a forest of stout little evergreens stood at attention. But in front of me lay all the rolling hills in their peaceful glory. The hills are painted in varying, shimmering shades of green, brown, and gold. When I leaned against the rocky outcroppings and looked down into the valley below, I could see the farmhouse. Occasionally the lit-

tle bright orange roofs of other houses peeked out of other folds in the rolling hills. A little further away from the cow pasture, the ground was very rocky, and here also the old stone foundations of farmhouses long abandoned slept contentedly. I wished I had gone there in my childhood. It would have been such a fun place to play in! There was no noise up there. Except for the whispering of some slumbering breeze, or the loud drumming of the occasional bursting wind, it was very quiet. The air smelled very clean. Wispy white clouds glided silently under the azure sky, being the ships of the heavens that they are. I hope to go back there one day, but it will probably be years before I do. Until then, the climb will remain a wonderful memory.

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The Cowardly Knight and Red Feather Duster

By Katelyn Lain

Big sister. Bodyguards have nothing on me. No aviators necessary. I'm talking Solo Swat Team. Little bully in the park? You could see his feathers stand straight up when I offered to bury his skinny little ostrich neck in

the park sand. Cousin pressures gullible sister to jump off a bridge? No problem. Dogs have puppies. Cats have kittens. And aunts can have more children.

But even sisters can change. One day Washington became a Benedict and Shakespeare became Walt Disney. And a sister became a traitor.

This change took place after our neighbors offered my sister and I a job taking care of their animals. Did we wonder why they were paying us so much money? No.

After arriving at our neighbor's farm, we strategized which animals to feed first. With all of the chickens fluttering around my feet, I led the way into the pasture feeling like Laura Ingalls Wilder in the prairie.

Suddenly, my ears were ringing from a scream as loud as glass shattering on tile. Knowing my dear sister, I was aware of her irrational fears. Breathe too loudly in a quiet room, and she may be the pole bending Olympic champion, without the pole of course. Anger singed my face as I turned around to face her.

"What is wrong with you?!"

I could see a big chicken behind her, flying up at her legs.

"This aggressive chicken keeps..." She screamed and jumped forward.

"It's just a chicken. It can't hurt you."

As I looked closer at the rather large chicken, I realized my mistake. "Rooster." The red beast was flailing at my sister's legs.

Like a British soldier he marched forward, bayonet hidden behind his bobbing rear. He blocked off the path back to the trench of our car. Like all good big sisters do, I ran—completely abandoning my baby sister. Away from the rooster, I ran off the path skipping over syrupy mud like trampolining off pancakes.

Decisions. I looked at the rooster and then looked at the barbed-wire fence. Barb wire or talons? Injecting needles or injecting scissors? I didn't care for either.

To my advantage, the rooster became

distracted and my sister and I tiptoed behind the brute.

Like all brilliant, creative homeschoolers, we decided to stick to feeding the other animals first... with one small alteration to the plan.

Bodyguard mode kicked back in after that first hiccup. In our neighbor's garage was a plastic lightsaber and a garbage can lid.

Armed, my sister and I, Darth Vader and garbageman, sneaked back to the pasture. We avoided direct contact and loss of casualties all the way to the rabbit pen. With rabbit feed in hand, my sister bequeathed me her shield, peasant-like as it was.

The rooster shuffled speedily to where we stood, a fiery red duster. A faithful knight I was not. My armor solidified and rusted. I could see the treasure map in the chicken's eye. Bucket. Food. Human!

Round and round the chicken jousting with his lance held forth. Round and round my sister ran. And where did I stand? A mere observer, crying from laughter.

Talk about reversal. From protective knight to hysterical peasant. The chicken finally caught my sister in the corner, flying up to her chest.

At that moment, our neighbor called my phone and I answered between deep breaths of laughter.

"Are you laughing or crying?" he asked.

Laughter.

"Is everything, okay?"

"Oh, yes. Everything is fine."

A blood-curdling scream.

Knights have chinks in their armor. Leaders become traitors. And sisters have reversal moments.

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Bears in These Parts

By Jessi Skrade

Eric Davis hunched over the counter of the hardware store and examined the mouse trap under the greenish fluorescent lighting, running his fingers over the delicately crossing wires that formed the mesh walls. It was a beautiful, kind little thing. How sweet its inventor must have been, to want the pests alive and unscathed as they were caught. *The trapping mechanism looked simple enough*, he thought, *but scaling it up?* He scribbled some arithmetic in the margins of the sheet of notebook paper and frowned at the sum. Eric sighed and crumpled the paper up before tossing it in the trash. The larger the creature, the more difficult it would be to make a humane version of the traps under an affordable budget. *I don't have that kind of money anyway*, he thought. He scrubbed a hand through his uncombed blond hair, punched out, and exited Lonny's Hardware and More for the evening.

The green trash bin lay overturned, greasy burger wrappers and newspapers quivering on the ground as the dusky breeze set in.

"Raccoons," Eric said under his breath. He collected the garbage and struggled to right the bin. A deep scratch in the surface caught his finger. Eric squinted in the fading light and traced it. Three more, lined up like tallies. "Not raccoons," he said aloud. "Definitely

not.” His heart began to pound, but the young cashier straightened, and calmly marched to his car. His clammy hands fumbled with the keys. The drive home was not far.

“It’s ok, it’s fine, they’re more afraid of you than you are of them,” he told himself over and over again as his squeaky red sedan bounced down the street. Ten minutes later Eric forced his way into his small house, double checked the locks on his windows and doors, and slapped together a grilled cheese and veggie bacon sandwich for dinner. His cat sauntered up next to his knee in the kitchen.

“What do you know, Theo?” he said and patted the orange cat’s head lovingly. He flopped onto the couch with his sandwich and half-watched a football game, though he was more entertained by Theo playing with a blanket. After the game, Eric tried to read a book he had been enjoying, but as he sat in his bed with the comforter drawn tight around his shoulders and his cat in his lap, the young man couldn’t stop thinking about those scratches on the trash bin.

If there’s a bear awake, it’s hungry, he thought. Eric shut off the light on his nightstand and curled up to sleep, holding Theo close to his chest. The little animal’s purr comforted him, but a lingering concern tickled the back of his mind: it found food from the bins today; it’ll be back for more, eventually. When he finally did fall asleep, he dreamed fitfully of lumbering, thudding paws and screams that made his spine turn to jelly. The night grew dark and moist. West Virginia was shedding the last remnants of winter, and apparently, the animals knew it just as well as the people.

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The bell above the glass door to the shop chimed. Eric saw Mike’s bulky frame walk into the aisle of screws out of the corner of his eye.

“Whatcha lookin’ at, Eric?” Mike’s voice echoed across the tile, backed by tinny

jazz from the loudspeakers. Eric’s bloodshot eyes remained glued to the boxy beige monitor behind the counter.

“Bear traps,” Eric murmured.

“Bear traps?” Mike laughed. “Don’tcha like animals? Or’s this one too big for you to handle?” His friend said nothing, but hopped off the wobbly stool and shuffled to the rubber hosing section. Mike’s brow furrowed. “Eric?”

“They’re waking up. Black bears don’t truly hibernate, you know.” Eric called over the shelves. “One got into the trash outside yesterday. The boss is still out of town, so I’ve gotta figure out a solution on my own. But the traps....” He fell silent as he scrutinized the hosing. His stomach churned when he imagined one closing on a paw, the animal crying out in pain, and – heaven forbid – chewing its own limb off to save its life.

“You see, it bothers me that there’s teeth on the darned things; I thought maybe there was a way to cage them, you know? Like a possum or mouse.”

His blond head poked out the end of the aisle, holding a length of rubber foam high. He jogged back to the counter. “But they’re just too big to build a cage trap. So – put your hands together in a circle, Mike – yes, like that!” Eric bit off small strips of duct tape and stuck it to Mike’s hands over the foam.

“You couldn’ta used regular? I got hairy hands, man.”

“Shh, let me think. Now snap your bear-trap-hand-jaws shut for me, please. As hard as you can.”

Mike rolled his eyes, but obliged, clamping his hands around Eric’s thin wrist. Eric grinned. “That will work! I’m sure of it!”

“You could just call animal control, bud.”

“Well, I did, but they said unless I’d actually seen the animal, they couldn’t come out. I’m just trying to think of my options here.” Eric scrubbed his hands through his hair and pulled the foam off Mike’s hands, eliciting a small “Ow.” Mike pushed a five-dollar

bill at him across the counter and pocketed his screws.

"Hope you get it figured out. Bears coming out of hibernation round here," he whistled a low whistle. "I don't envy you!" Mike called from the door. Eric grunted in agreement and turned back to the monitor. Not five minutes later, something scrabbled against the glass. The doorbell chimed.

"Forget something?" Eric said teasingly. A dingy, musky smell wafted behind the counter. Eric looked up. He froze. The black bear huffed at him, and the rank breath of such a creature filled Eric's tingling sinuses. Eric slipped sideways off his stool and stood to his full height, which was not much. The bear wobbled up to the impulse purchase display and began to pull at the bags of jerky. Oh. Oh no. Mike had been outside seconds before. *Is he okay?* Eric hadn't heard any noise, but then again, he wasn't really paying much attention.

"Please," Eric whispered to the bear. "Please, let me leave." The hungry animal made eye contact, and snuffed. Those eyes were wild, and hungry. Eric took an experimental step, cold sweat trickled down his back. The bear stalked slowly around the counter, and Eric felt his legs twitch. He launched himself over the other side, slipped on the slick linoleum, and tumbled to the floor.

"Shoot," he gasped. The bear snarled and Eric felt the floor shake under its thick paws. He didn't remember standing, but Eric's legs carried him to the farthest corner away from the creature. *I should have gone for the door*, he thought, appalled at his panic. He began to hyperventilate. *Breathe, breathe! What do I know about them?*

"How can I defend myself?" he whispered. A loud, metallic screech and thud echoed through the shop told him the bear had pushed over a display. It could smell him. *They have sensitive noses*. Eric felt his animal-loving gut writhe. He needed a weapon. To potentially hurt a living thing. He steeled his nerves and began to assess his options. There was some rope, but he couldn't rip

through the thick packaging fast enough. Garden shears? A pool of blood flashed through his mind. He shook his head. *No, no stabbing*. Another display crashed to the floor, accompanied by a rumbling growl.

It wants to kill me, he thought. He grabbed a small monkey-wrench, only eight inches long, and crept to the other end of the aisle. He had last seen the bear between him and the door. Maybe, if he snuck back through the hosing shelves, he could make a break for it. The shelf next to him shivered, and he heard spray paint cans clattering to the floor. The bear had moved. He could make it. Eric sprinted to the door, and his fingertips just barely brushed the push handle before he felt something tearing into his ankle. He screamed and twisted in the air as he was ripped to the ground. The bear's teeth dug deeper into what little muscle Eric possessed and shook his leg violently.

Eric's back popped and he grew dizzy as his own blood sprinkled across the floor. *I'm going to die here*. The sentence flashed through his mind. *It isn't the bear's fault; it's just being the way a bear is*. But then, another thought. *Who's going to feed my cat?* Theo didn't have anyone else. He *needed* to live.

Eric writhed and swung his little wrench wildly. The bear's slab-like paw slapped his flailing arm; Eric's wrist flopped awkwardly. Something cracked beneath his skin. He kicked up with his good leg as hard as he could, the toe of his sneaker catching the bear on its snout. The bear yelped and drew back, rubbing its nose. Eric felt a pang of guilt. He dragged himself upright and raised the wrench to hit the creature again. His arm was frozen. In spite of it actively hunting him, he could only see a strong, terrifyingly beautiful beast. The bear's coat shone in spite of its months of little nutrition. A trickle of bright red blood dripped out its soft nose, and its eyes sparked, almost intelligently.

Eric felt one of his eardrums shatter. He fell backwards against the front counter in shock. The bear whipped around, stumbling.

Mike's eyes were wide with terror. He raised his rifle and shot the creature again.

"Mike!" Eric knew he yelled, but he heard no sound. The bear swiped at Mike, catching his faded flannel sleeve, cutting into his arm. Eric looked on helplessly as Mike sprinted out of his sight, away from the enraged animal. The bear jolted backwards as Mike fired another round into its shoulder. Eric's heart lurched as it fell on its side, feet pedalling in the air. Mike reappeared at the end of the aisle. He winced as he raised his rifle.

"Don't look," Mike's lips said. A whine shrilled over Mike's voice. Eric squeezed his eyes shut as Mike pushed the barrel of the gun up to the fallen animal's eye. Tears rolled down his cheeks. A final pop deep in his ears told him that the bear was dead. His ankle and arm throbbed. He shivered when he felt wet warmth dripping down his ankle into his sock. Eric opened one eye and immediately looked away from the slain beast, resisting the urge to vomit at the sight.

"I'm going to call an ambulance for you," Mike said, walking behind the counter to use the store phone. His voice moved in and out, like he was underwater. The ringing in Eric's ears clearly hadn't afflicted his friend the same way. Eric limped over to his stool behind the counter and sat down, cradling his broken arm. His friend patted his shoulder comfortingly and said into the receiver,

"Hello? Yes, I need medical attention, at Lonny's Hardware and More on Walleye Street. There's been a bear attack. Yes, I mean like a black bear. What, you think I'm lyin'? No! Send an ambulance!"

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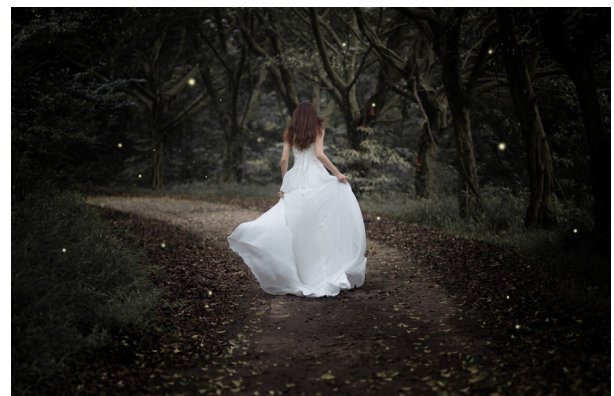
Eric shuffled through his mail at his dining room table and sipped at his coffee. His heart skipped a beat as he read the address.

"From the United States Patent and Trademark Office, to Mr. Eric Davis," he

breathed. Theo rubbed up against his pajama-clad calf. Eric hissed, a twinge of pain shooting up his leg, and gently moved the cat away with his other foot. "Mr. Davis: We are pleased to inform you that your invention, the Safe-T-Trap large animal entrapment device has been accepted for patenting. Your rights are as follows . . ." He skimmed the technical language littering the rest of the letter and whooped. Eric pumped his fist in the air, and limped to his phone on the wall to call Mike and share the news.

Every day since "the incident," as his family and friends referred to it, Eric woke up thankful that he had survived, thanks to someone braver than he. His wrist couldn't bend quite as well as it once could, his hearing wasn't perfect, and deep, angry red puncture scars riddled his left ankle, but Eric had escaped death's trap with his life. Theo purred, Mike yelled his congratulations over the phone, and Eric lived.

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A Gentleman

By Kathleen Coyle

Nicoletta stretched her hand out in front of her to allow Mary to slip a ring onto her finger then tilted her hand from side to side, admiring the way the diamond sparkled.

"Nervous, Milady?" Mary asked.

"Nervous? Never. I'm dying of excitement," Nicoletta answered without looking at Mary, unable to tear her gaze away from her own reflection in the mirror. She ran her fingers down the silky front of her gown, smoothing out the nonexistent wrinkles. "I have been waiting for this day my whole life, Mary, there's no way I could be nervous."

"Of course, I misspoke, Princess. Now, where did I leave that nettlesome veil?"

"In the drawing room, on the chaise."

"Oh! You're right, I'll fetch it now."

Mary waddled out unnoticed by Nicoletta as she continued to admire her reflection. She lifted her heavy skirts and poked her foot out, turning it from side to side, allowing the row upon row of small crystals to catch the light.

Married, she thought, *Today, I'll be married at last*. A grin split her face as she twirled atop her pedestal.

"Compose yourself, Milady!" Mary called as she stepped back into the room, "You'll wrinkle your gown."

"What do you think he's like?"

"Well, what do you think he'll be like?"

"I think he'll be handsome and charming and *rich*. I bet he is the richest man in all of Lota. Once I'm married I want to own a dozen gowns all as magnificent as this one." Nicoletta twirled again causing Mary to cluck her tongue.

"Rich or not you'll still have to marry him. As your father commands it. If I were you, Milady, I would get your head out of the clouds lest your impossible standards leave you less than satisfied."

"Mary! How could you say something like that? He has to be rich. I am a princess, I deserve only the best." Mary rolled her eyes as she placed her fists atop her hips.

"There is more to a man than his money. Gold does not make a man kind."

"Well Father would not promise me to an unkind man now, would he?"

Mary sighed and gathered both of

Nicoletta's hands in her own. "My child, ever since you were a wee thing you have adored your father, but it has been a long time since those days when he would play with you in the garden."

"What is your point with all of this Mary?"

"I just don't want you to be hurt if you come to realize that your father is not all the man that he used to be."

"I don't like what you are insinuating. My father is a good man."

"I am not saying that he isn't. I just want you to be careful."

Nicoletta's back stiffened. "Who are you to tell me what to do? You are just a maid."

"Yes, I know that is all I am." Mary's eyes softened. "Nevertheless, I have been with you for many years now. I would like to think that I know you by now. I have raised you like my own and I love you, Milady."

Nicoletta held out her arms and Mary went into her embrace, holding her lightly so as not to wrinkle the gown.

"I love you too. I did not mean to snap."

"I know. You mean so much to me, Milady. I just hope that your dreams do not cloud your reality." Mary stepped away from Nicoletta and fanned her misty eyes. "Now come down here so that I may put your veil on your head."

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Nicoletta stood in front of the large wooden doors that led into the chapel. A booming organ played. Mary straightened the slender tiara atop Nicoletta's head.

"If I didn't know better, Milady, I would say you look nervous." Mary raised an eyebrow as Nicoletta pressed both her hands against her stomach.

"Perhaps you were just the slightest bit right in your assessment. My dress is so

heavy and my shoes are so delicate. I'll trip for sure."

"You have always walked with such grace. No one will even notice if you stumble."

"There will be so many eyes on me."

"You look radiant, your beauty will blind everyone from any missteps." Nicoletta turned to Mary and clutched her hands.

"Thank you Mary. This is why you've always been my favorite maid."

"Oh! Don't go getting emotional on me. It's time! Hurry! Stand up straight and smile!" Mary flipped Nicoletta's veil over her face, letting the fabric flutter into place shrouding Nicoletta's features just as the doors began to creak open and the music began to swell.

Nicoletta glided down the aisle in a trance. Whispers zinged around the pews as the guests marveled at Nicoletta's opulent gown and accessories.

When Nicoletta reached the end of the aisle she climbed the few steps to her waiting fiancé and raised her hand to place it in his, her bracelets clinking lightly as she moved her arm.

A hot clammy hand clamped down upon hers. His skin was wrinkled and had liver spots, looking ancient against Nicoletta's smooth skin. His grip was tight, unyielding. *Don't panic, don't panic, don't panic, he's only nervous just like you. Right?*

Even from behind the veil, Nicoletta noticed his short stature accentuated by a round belly. His breaths wheezed in and puffed out, sending with them an overwhelming stench of rot.

To Nicoletta, the ceremony dragged on and on. She couldn't stop thinking about the vise grip her fiancé had on her wrist. She tried to subtly twist her wrist to make him loosen his hold but all he did was hold on tighter. Her hand began to sweat and her fingers slowly went numb and tingly.

"Now you may kiss the bride." Nicoletta almost didn't hear the priest's words.

Kiss? I have to kiss this? Wait, I want this, right? Confusion swirled within her. Why, why am I suddenly so full of dread?

Her fiancé released his grip only to latch onto the veil. When he flicked it behind Nicoletta's head she got her first full glance of him. She fought to contain her gasp.

He had greasy hair, what was left of it, slicked away from his forehead. His skin was pockmarked and ruddy.

Nicoletta's eyes darted about his figure frantically, searching for something, any redeeming quality he might have. But where she hoped to find a kind gaze, all she saw was hunger. He knew that she was his, a possession. Nicoletta jerked her head to her father's eyes, begging for help.

The king's expression was hard. He would not help her. He knew who this man was and still he sold his daughter to him.

Nicoletta turned her eyes back to her fiancé just as he took a step towards her. She stumbled back, desperate to escape his grasp.

"No." She mumbled.

"No? No! How dare you deny me?"

He lunged for Nicoletta's arm but she jumped back again. *I can't. I won't.*

Nicoletta took one second to look at the large wooden doors before lurching in their direction. She staggered down the aisle, each step seeming to take an eternity. Her left foot wobbled, the delicate heel threatening to take her down, her legs drowning in yards of heavy silk.

Her hands touched the oak doors. She tasted freedom.

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Nicoletta didn't know how long she ran but when she couldn't run any longer, she found herself collapsed in a large open field full of golden wheat. Her shoes were gone, her hair was loose, falling haphazardly across her back and shoulders. Her once pristinely white dress was torn and muddy.

Nicoletta's breath sucked in, stabbing at her lungs, and whooshed out, keeping time with the throbbing of her calves. She only had the energy to sit and stare at the sun as it slowly kissed the mountains.

"Miss?"

Nicoletta gasped and turned. A young man stood a little behind her, bending down slightly.

"Miss, are you alright?"

"I don't...I don't know. I don't think so." Nicoletta stared down at her hands. She noticed small cuts on her fingers and a leaf caught in a piece of lace.

A hand appeared in her vision.

"Let me help you."

Nicoletta moved to place her hand in his, but she cringed back at the dirt caked under his nails. She turned her gaze to his face. His eyes, they were so kind, crinkled slightly at the edges and warm. She placed her hand in his. Hers soft and pale from years locked away in a palace; his rough and tan from years laboring in the sun.

"I'm Henry."

"I'm...Nicole." She winced when a sharp twig dug into the sole of her foot as Henry pulled her up from the ground.

"You're a long way from the palace, Nicole."

"How did you—?"

"That dress, the only place it could have come from is the palace. Folks out here don't have such fine garments."

"Well, it's not very fine anymore."

Nicoletta said under her breath.

"Oh, I'm sure anything would look fine so long as you were wearing it, miss." Nicoletta's cheeks flushed. She peeked at Henry's face from beneath lowered lashes. *He's quite handsome, I guess, even with the dirt.* "Come, Nicole, let's get you inside where you can wash up and rest those poor feet." Henry began to lead her to a small abode, tucked against a line of trees.

Nicoletta paused. As kind as Henry was, she didn't know him. Nicoletta, unused

to forming her own opinions about people, was unsure of what to think of him.

"You would take me in, just like that? I'm sure you have so many questions about what I am doing here," Nicoletta said, knowing full well that she had many questions of her own.

"I have questions, yes. But those can wait. Right now it seems as though you could really use some kindness."

"Kindness or not, I don't know you, sir." Nicoletta straightened her shoulders hoping to appear a little more intimidating.

"I mean you no harm, madam."

Nicoletta only narrowed her eyebrows.

"Or perhaps you would like to take your chances with them?" Henry tilted his head towards the tree line from which Nicoletta had emerged.

"With whom?"

"Can't you hear that? In the distance?" Nicoletta shook her head. "Listen harder. The clanking, the snorting. Palace horses perhaps."

Nicoletta's eyes widened.

"I'm not looking to hurt you. Please let me help you."

"But you just threatened me!"

"It was not a threat, milady! Honest! I was only warning you. You did not seem too eager to go back, I only wish to help you evade them."

Nicoletta thought for a moment. *Seemingly kind and helpful Henry or palace guards and evil husbands.* It did not seem like such a hard choice to Nicoletta. *Yes, kindness is worth more than a hundred fine gowns.*

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"Henry! Henry, come quick!" Nicoletta wiped her wet hands on her apron and moved to the window. A fire crackled in the hearth filling the small house with its warmth.

"What is it, dear? What's wrong?"

Henry came racing into the room and paused when he was right behind Nicoletta.

"It's the first snow." Nicoletta placed her hand upon the glass window, the cold surface chilling her fingertips. "In the palace, I only ever saw snow from inside. I was never allowed out."

"It amazes me at how excited you get over the most mundane of things." Henry placed his hand around her waist and pressed a kiss to her temple.

"Snow is *not* mundane. It's wonderful, mystical, beautiful. I am your *wife*, how dare you tease me so!" Henry's hearty laugh rang out.

"Me? Tease you? Well I never!"

"Come, I want to build a snowman." Nicoletta rushed to the front door where she began lacing up her boots.

"A snowman? My love, it is cold outside and you'll get dirty."

"Who cares about a little dirt?"

"I remember a time when *you* cared about a little dirt." Henry chuckled as he cupped Nicoletta's cheek, rubbing away a small dirty streak. Nicoletta paused in her task of lacing her boots to glance up at Henry and gave him a soft smile. Then she stood up and placed her hands on her hips.

"Henry, I may be your wife but I am *still* a princess. I command you to put on your boots and enjoy the snow with me."

"For you, your highness? Anything."

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Meditations on the Sun's Return

By Seth Farmer

To you I hear the oak tree call
In seasons plagued with death.
In winter and in colored fall
The leaves long for your breath.
The bear, just to sustain her life,
Crawls to the darkest cave.
The birds take off in southern flight
In hope of brighter days.
The crops are covered in the cold
For months they see no light.
Their roots are longing to be told
That winter lost the fight
The sun will come and spring return
Our axis wills it so.
But until then our hearts will burn
With hope that light will grow.

Crow

By Vicki Olachea

Blacker than the River Styx
Dark, in daylight flies;
Moonless night, flitting, winks,
Glossy to the eyes
But -
Oh! Memory of midnight
What are these raucous cries?
With undeserved beauty wings
The Scoundrel of the skies.



LasreveR

By Sarah Kanoun

Whispers in the wind that carry all I've ever loved—
My heart beats faster, faster now.
My soul feels not enough.
I watch those whispers swirl around
And dive down deep below.
I watch them run away from me—
“They’ll not come back.” –I know.
Can someone help me find the piece
That leads me to myself?
The ladder leading down the bank
To find my old youth’s health.
I see a shadow in the sand

I've never seen before.
"Who's that?" I say, and that's just it—
There's more to me—much more.
I hear a crystal laugh and see a shining, happy face,
And all around I see myself—
I feel her in this place.
If I could just reach out to feel
And touch those grains of sand,
I think that I could find my life—
My strength in both my hands.

Antonia

By Abril Brito Mones

After he died everything changed.
Us twelve children left fatherless,
our bank accounts a total mess,
and mother's cheeks, all tear-streak stained.
But with rolled sleeves she overcame.
She made sure we would stay in school
because "your mother raised no fools."
And though she never went herself,
she learned what she could so us twelve
could find our futures all well paved.

She washed, she cleaned, she sold ice cream
so, despite not being wealthy,
she could keep us fed and healthy
Our mom taught us to be a team,
to help each other live our dreams.
And though she took the role of dad,
with every chance she got would add
that the All Mighty, the Most High,



could be our Father, our Ally
who's over everything supreme.

Author's Note:

"Antonia" is a Décima or Espinela—a Spanish poetic structure—loosely based on my grandmother's efforts after the death of her husband. A décima's abbaaccddc rhyme scheme lends itself perfectly for narration. With this issue's theme of reversal, I chose to alter the rhyme of the last line to emphasise the change and adaptation of the Brito Correa matriarch.

You Hate Your Smile

By Meredith Thomas

I know you hate your
smile
And try to hide your laugh,
But darling,
Joy looks good on you. In fact,
Those elegant fragments of colors
Never looked better. And if you could see
your stained glass eyes
Through mine, you would understand
My stares and looks of wonder. I know you've been
broken before,
Many times over, but
I promise you
To reverse those cracks and rebuild those
Beautiful windows that
Let in so much
light.



If Only I Could Walk at Night

By Olivia J. Thomas

If only I could turn back time
To live forever in the hours when
I felt my heart was most alive
Lovely eleven to two a.m.
When sky is painted darkest blue
Memories of sunset burn my eyes
The moon is promising peace renewed
And all the world seems soft and kind.
Though it seems so dark I feel so full
Of colors so bright and vivid and endless
I skate along in this gentle lull
For a moment all my sorrow feels painless.
But to my chagrin the clock ticks on while
I remain wrapped in dreams of magenta
Others march towards the denouement
Their lives passing by like dusty novellas.

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