

Etchings



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We would like to welcome you to the fall edition of *Etchings Literary and Fine Arts Magazine, Volume 28 Issue 1*. This has been an incredibly exciting semester for the magazine as our staff worked to complete the issue in record time. We and the staff were thrilled with the level of participation and we would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to the magazine and to the success it has generated.

For several years and editions, the staff has been striving to boost the quantity and quality of submissions. We felt that the previous editions had been extremely successful, so for this edition, we, along with the staff, strove to be increasingly selective with the acceptances, choosing only the best of the best. It turned out great for everyone involved.

A lot of hard work went into the creation of this magazine and we would like to thank the staff for all of their energy, commitment and hard work because, without them, there would be no magazine. A very special thank you goes to our design editors, Gabbie Brown and Dani McCormick, because this magazine would not have put together without them. We would also like to thank our faculty advisor, Kevin McKelvey, who encouraged everyone to constantly be doing our best and continue on the legacy of editions past.

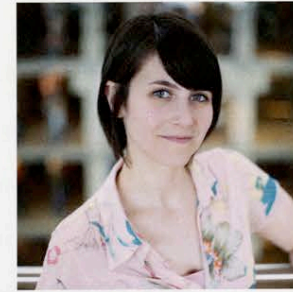
We would also like to thank the English Department and English department chair Dr. Kyoko Amano for her continued support and confidence as we worked to create this issue of *Etchings*. As always, we have nothing but gratitude for Triangle Printing for their hard work, talent, and expertise making the magazine the best it could be.

Once again, it has been a privilege to create *Etchings Literary and Fine Arts Magazine*. We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the writers and artists who submitted. Your submissions are why we create an amazing magazine, and it is an honor to enjoy your work. We look forward to many more issues.

Sincerely,

Rachel Holtzclaw and Dani McCormick

DORLISS GOTT ARMENTROUT AWARD



Hannah Stephenson is a poet, editor, and instructor living in Columbus, Ohio (where she also runs a literary event series called Paging Columbus). She is the author of *In the Kettle, the Shriek* (Gold Wake Press), editor of *New Poetry from the Midwest* (New American Press) and *The Ides of March: An Anthology of Ohio Poets* (Columbus Creative Cooperative), and a poetry and arts blogger for *The Huffington Post*. Her writing has appeared in publications that include *The Atlantic*, *32 Poems*, *The Journal*, *Sixth Finch*, *Poetry Daily*, and *The Nervous Breakdown*. You can visit her online at The Storialist (www.thestorialist.com).

Winner

You Can Only Keep as Much as You Can Carry | Kaylie Ann Pickett

First Honorable Mention

boiling water from somewhere in the walls of a horse-hair-plastered house scratches at my scalp 'til it's tender | Tierney Bailey

Second Honorable Mention

Mirna Palacio is a Leech | Mirna Palacio



Caregiver | Paige Stratton

You Can Only Keep as Much as You Can Carry |

Kaylie Ann Pickett

Native American blood, hard and Kentuckian, has flushed his face for a lifetime of seventy-three years. Papaw rocks back and forth on the side of a bed draped in quilts with his face hollow and gray. The yellow skin around his eyes sags more today than it did even yesterday. Little John helps him remove his coat and his big feet dangle in boots that haven't worked in just over two months. When people deteriorate, it happens fast.

When I was sixteen, I would sneak behind my grandparents' barn to smoke cigarettes. The grass was damp and my cigarette smoke blended smoothly into the soundless fog of an early, southern Indiana morning. Two birds chirped at each other, and the chickens squabbled over the last kernels of corn from the night before. I heard the soft hum of a golf cart motor and shoved my cigarette into the soil and attempted to crouch—as naturally as no one ever did.

"I know you're smoking those cigarettes, Ms. Abby." Papaw cleared his throat.

"Ah, well...yeah—"

"—I made a lot of mistakes in my life. Used to treat your grandma pretty bad. Did you know your papaw here can't read?"

"No." I did know that. My mother had told me a few years ago.

"Yep, I tried learnin' again when you was just a little girl."

"Well, maybe if you—"

"—you was so little, Ms. Abby, and you just loved them books and you would sit on my lap and say, 'read to me, Papaw, read to me.' But, oh, Miss Abby, you was so smart and you had it figured out real quick that I wasn't really readin' them words to ya. And you'd say, 'Papaw, that's not what it says!' And you'd just laugh and carry on!"

I pulled at the grass and shook my head. Though it is an innate and innocent thing, I was nonetheless embarrassed by the tactless ignorance of budding childhood.

"No, listen to me now. Your papaw's a smart a man, but I have to be because I can't read a lick. But you know what, I'd give anything to write your grandma a letter. You got to be smarter with yourself, Ms.

Abby. You got an advantage over folks like me but you still gotta be careful."

"I know, I'm going to. I'm just going through a rough patch."

"Yeah? Well, that's alright then, hon. Just make sure it don't last a lifetime."

Mamaw falls on her knees to untie his laces. She pulls up from the heels and steel-toed boots fly across the room while he kicks his legs like a seventy-three year old child. His chest heaves and he labors for just one good deep breath. He wheezes in agony, gasping, doubling each intake of air only to exhale a small burst, a weak little hem. He doesn't have the wind to cough. His eyes are bloodshot and murky, and they sweep over our faces for any trace of promise. He searches beseechingly for a gesture that might indicate that he is not yet forsaken and I pray that he doesn't interpret the helplessness in our expressions as foreboding omens.

At twenty-two years old, I moved in with my grandparents. I wasn't a recent college graduate; I wasn't having trouble finding work in my prestigious, specified field. I was just a heavy drinker and recently divorced from a short and violent marriage. I drove home daily with a jug of Carlos Rossi between my legs, whipping around sharp country turns and singing Kris Kristofferson out the window at cows and men mowing their lawns.

Mamaw was a Christian woman who read her Bible between naps and trips to Wal-Mart. No matter the temperature, she sat with a blanket on her lap and dogs at her feet while journaling verses in notebooks that held revelations for herself and chosen family members. She didn't force her religion or these prophecies on anyone, and she only asked me about my own salvation once. But Mamaw spoke of Jesus matter-of-factly. She would claim "the Lord says" as casually as "it's supposed to rain tonight." And we'd all just glance at each other and nod respectfully because we knew that for her, Jesus was as real as the house in which we stood.

Papaw was a beer drinker in the garage and he liked zydeco and blues music. I once made a playlist for him and it didn't take but two guitar rings before he said, "Oh, that's that ol' Muddy." I don't know if he actually liked Muddy Waters or if he was just noting the man's popularity, as though Papaw were the first ever and oldest living hipster. I watched him as he whistled along, moving about old boxes

and buckets. He picked out unrecognizable tools and rusty car parts, and without purpose, he coolly examined each one before tossing them back into their crate. Most of the talking we did was full of his advice, which was funny and judgmental, but mostly correct—and painfully so.

"Now, Ms. Abby, you just stay in school."

"I know, I know, I am. I'm going to go back and finish this time, I have to."

"And tell you what. You stay away from anyone wearing those silly-ass tennis shoes."

"Which shoes?" I smiled.

"If they got them silly shoes on, you just leave 'em alone."

Papaw associated failure and immaturity with Chuck Taylors. To him, there was a strong correlation between the young poor and this shoe. Every friend I knew wore them. Every boyfriend I brought home wore them. My ex-husband wore them. I owned several pairs in black, navy blue, and bubblegum pink. And each and every one of us were as impoverished and under-accomplished as he saw in those shoes.

I lived with my grandparents for four months and every day they reminded me they loved having me and encouraged me to stay as long as I liked. Although it was a temporary arrangement, I was unable to bring myself to disappoint them and tell them I had found a place and was moving out. A coward, guilty and artless, I waited until they had both fallen asleep to silently pack my belongings into my Jeep.

I left my key on the coffee table next to a bowl of M&M's, and from the end of the couch, I watched Papaw as he slept and snored. The television was loud and flickered lights on the walls and furniture and I stood there in the blue light of *True Grit*. My face became hot and I shrank as I imagined my awful stutter if he were to wake and ask what I was doing, but he never turned or flinched. And John Wayne's dusty, orange face grinned at the two of us through the television screen there in that living room scene that would go on to live infinitely in my memory. Even then, I knew that someday I would have to answer for these things.

Splayed across her cheeks, Mamaw's silver and white curls are sodden with sweat and tears. She howls at Jesus through the ceiling before she turns to me. "Ms. Abby, get us some help! Oh, get us some help!"

I run madly out of the room and scramble through the house for a phone. I am too afraid to dial 911, and so I think instead to call my mother and kill two birds with one stone. I can inform her of her father's state, and I can get help because she is a nurse.

"He can't breathe, Mom!"

"Lay him down!" She shrieks into the phone. "Lay him down and get his Niacin!"

Dashing back to Papaw, I hold the doorframe and swing hastily into the room and into a scene that has changed terribly. The jarring sight gives me whiplash and I nearly lose my balance as I freeze in place. Papaw is sitting upright with his arms and legs stiff as planks and outstretched like some sort of Frankenstein. His eyes are fixed in my direction—yet they are not on me but they are looking right through me in such terror and in such a way I have never seen a person stare into space. Into the space I stand, he stares, out of his mind and into the abyss.

"What do you see, Garnet? What is it? Do you see Jesus?" Mamaw raises her hands above her head. "Praise you, Father! Praise you!"

I was particularly broke one Sunday in January and I went to visit my grandparents. Even when I was twenty-five years old, Papaw was still handing me a one-hundred dollar bill each and every time he saw me. If he didn't have a hundred, he would give me whatever miscellaneous bills were in his wallet. It would seem that at the height of my selfishness I would seize every opportunity to spend time with him, and subsequently, spend his money. But I preferred my grandma. Mamaw was an easygoing woman who adopted her judgments complementary to whatever I wanted or determined I needed at any given time. She was supportive of almost everything, even things that went against her Christian beliefs. Papaw was difficult and often argumentative against things he didn't understand, and the older I grew, the more reluctant I became to tolerate his opinions and suffer his advices.

That afternoon, Papaw fixed a hodgepodge of foods for lunch. He brought everything out on three trays, setting a tray on my lap, a tray on Mamaw's lap, and one on his own. We ate biscuits and gravy, hot dogs, fried tomatoes, and some kind of chili he had concocted days before. The three of us feasted and watched old Western films, laughing at the absurdity of the outdated plots and dramatic, bad acting.

"When your Mamaw goes to church tonight, you ought to ride with me to the sale barn, Ms. Abby, and take a look at these little chickens they got down there."

"Sure, yeah." I cringed. "Sounds fun."

Mamaw's heels clicked against the hardwood floor as she bustled back and forth between the bedrooms and bathrooms getting ready for her Sunday night service. She ironed a decadent pantsuit, changed purses and earrings, and sprayed perfume all over herself.

"How's it look?" She hurried before Papaw and cocked her fuzzy head to the side.

"Looks real nice, Mom. Awfully purdy."

Papaw stood up from his recliner and I promptly closed my eyes. I heard his keys jingle as he threw on his oversized, Carhart coat.

"Well, Ms. Abby, I'm going to start the truck. We'll be ready to take off here in a few minutes."

I remained silent and pretended to sleep as he left the room and went outside. I listened as the garage door opened and shut, and I listened to his truck engine click and blaze. The door opened and shut again and his heavy boots clumped slow and steady down the hallway as I faked some deep coma on the couch.

"Ms. Abby?"

I kept my eyes sealed and monitored the sounds of his feet. He shifted his weight back and forth, lingering and delaying.

"Alright, hon," he said before he left alone without me.

The phone shivers in my hand with the volume of my mother's cries. "Get his Niacin, Goddamnit! Abby?"

"He is laying down now. He's laying on his side. Should he lay on his back?"

"Yes, yes, get him on his back."

"Papaw? Mom says you have to lay on your back. Just lay flat and try to breathe, okay?"

"I'm on my way." My mother's voice wails between sentences. "Keep him with us. I'll call an ambulance." She hangs up. I drop the phone on the floor.

"Get him on his back." I point to Little John, my giant cousin, who stands with a wet face in the closet. The two of us grab Papaw's wide and frail shoulder and pull him down flat, and he chokes on his short breath.

"I'm leaving."

"No, you're not. It's going to be okay. Mom is on her way. The ambulance is on its way."

A discouraging liquid gurgles through his voice: "I'm going home."

"Stop it." I place my hand on his heart. "Stop talking like that."

From her hushed prayers in the corner, Mamaw reaches out and confesses, "Garnet, I have loved you since the day I knew you."

"I know, Mom, I know."

I wipe his forehead and slide a few stray hairs back into place.

"Papaw, look at me."

"I'm ready, Lord; take me, please."

"No!"

"...please, Lord..."

A white foam froths from the corners of his mouth and submerges his pleas, silencing them with a soft power. For what seems like hours, but is at most sixty seconds, Mamaw, Little John, and I are sucked into a vacuum and all is still except for the muted rise and fall of Papaw's chest, and the phone that rings and rings from its place on the floor.

Mamaw breaks first and picks up the phone and leaves the room to answer it. Little John slumps down and sits on his knees down on the floor with his face in his hands. I kiss the top of his head, and I move to stand at the end of the bed. I take Papaw's feet into my hands, and I rub them and look into his face that is propped up on a pillow, and I smile at him. He looks into my face, and I swear he smiles back at me until his eyes lose their focus, resolving into a gaze of sheer wonder. And I go on rubbing his feet, long after I feel their warmth leave his socks.

Papaw used to have this giant kettle filled to the brim with coins, a legitimate pot of gold to a four year old girl. He told me that I spent hours playing in these coins and would become hysterical when my parents said it was time to go home and leave the treasure behind. Papaw would hand me a plastic grocery sack and tell me to take some coins with me. He said that I would stuff the bag so full and heavy that I was unable to lift it. He would then dump the bag back into the kettle and tell me to try again.

"You can only keep as much as you can carry, Ms. Abby."

And again, I would fill the sack far too full for my own weight, and again he would tell me, "You can only keep as much as you can carry."

And again and again he would empty the bag back into the kettle, and again and again I ignored the lesson, and I would try to fill it back up.

He loved telling me this story. He smiled so kindly—so benevolently—when he got to the part where he said, "And you'd just cry and cry, Ms. Abby, and you'd say, 'Why Papaw, why?'"

CONTRIBUTORS

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