Memoryhouse is a student-run literary magazine that encourages undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff to share their first-person narratives with one another through writing. We feature creative nonfiction and poetry that present concrete narratives, as well as art and photography. Memoryhouse releases three issues per year and hosts a fully functional website with original content and an active blog. In addition to presenting written work, Memoryhouse also organizes quarterly events that range from treks to theaters, comedy clubs, and other performance spaces to interactive writing and art projects.

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In our first-ever print issue, Memoryhouse presents a diverse compilation of poems, essays, and artwork that have lovingly undergone the workshopping process, emerging as highly polished examples of the memoir genre. Whether selected as first drafts or seventh drafts, thematically alike or dissimilar, each poem, essay, and artwork represents artist as real, vulnerable subjects, their memories and self-presentations defining them. From stories of homesickness and childhood nightmares to self-portraits written in verse and immortalized in paint, the works featured consist of the submissions deemed exemplary, the best of the best. We hope they will move you, excite you, rattle you, and make you reflect on yourselves as both memoirists and individuals.

Alida Miranda-Wolff, Founding Editor

I stepped onstage to boos
They were incredibly audible
And hard to hear
The crowd swarmed like scared ants
They weren’t here to see me
A skinny
Nervous
Unknown
Poet

Not when they had paid
Ten easy-earned dollars
To see ‘Harry Chewbacca and the Suns of Africa’
Chicago’s premier
Reggae-punk
Accordion-based
Vegan-electro
Seventeen-piece
A bottle smashed at my feet
It looked like Old Style
But it’s hard to tell when it’s thrown straight at you
Flying end over end
Through the dim lights of ‘El Cantina’
All you can do is duck and
Exit: Stage right
The next night.
The same dim light.
The same sliced limes in plastic trays.
The same glowing sign
With the same burned-out ‘I’
Giving the neon a pessimistic denotation

The door was flanked on both sides
“Old Style - $3; Well drinks - $5” on the left
Me, with a stack of my poems on the right
And as they came in for the old style
And to drink well
I pressed my body and soul
Into each palm
It’s easy to hate a stranger
To hurl insults and bottles
And drag him down into the dirt
But if he knows your fear
If he has fought
Your fights
If he lives
How they once lived
If he has bared his soul to the world
And it hurt him back at him
And if
Most importantly
He can make these bitter struggles
Sweet, and almost noble
Then he is not so easy
To hate
I stepped onstage to cheers
I was no longer buried
In the dirt beneath my shoes
For they knew my words
And my world
And my self
And this skinny
Nervous
Poet
Was a stranger no more

All photography throughout the magazine by Lauren Kelly-Jones
He was a bookstore placed alongside a church where, like a mangy pigeon, I perched for an hour, maybe two to swipe a morsel of verse from a vendor with no sock in his shoe. And next I swept myself onto the street to bump into the people I could meet and taste why a pastry is sweet—why the window-sized view of people sitting as they’re passing you is sumptuously complete.

It is a day like one I have thought up before, the one that was bright or the one that poured, the one through which I ambled along the Seine—

for it is no pleasure to remember now and then—though I do think about that witty zinger he presented to us all over starlit dinner, along with the cobblestones that click and linger….

And here, on the bridge with a forgotten name a small man shoots a docile flame from one unassuming index finger. With cigarette in mouth he sneers, I wrote about him, and now he appears in the singed flesh beneath prickly beard with his miserable stare and perfected frown, like a single page that refuses to stay down.

Yet upon waking he is standing here—no limping, no swaying, slurring his sayings—a blur, the brightest background charm, and though it is not him I hold in my arms—though his sound is a desultory whim caressing harstools and salted rims—still my arms are full of him.

And may I add that it is most sublime to be nocturnal half of the time—a scruffy owl slipping out of her towel into shoes she can barely climb. Through rushing night I fly hand around waist, him at my side teetering on a five-inch high, all the better to see whether I am capable of ruffling a few feathers.

We run through the tunnels together joining so quickly in points of pleasure, and ten minutes later, sipping Kirs by the hour we read like many brief encounters as we play out night undercover, two streetlamp beams bouncing off each other, and yet what is most precious to discover, what I nibble at with my beak, constantly seek, are just the shadows my stilettos make.

No, it is the river curving in a shiver, like a root under graying winter.

Yet in bed, with a breathing chest beneath my head sometimes I think about the dead. How many eyes I met in assorted halls that, bulging, gasping, held in thrall, did splash about in my seeing straits and, briefly forgetful of the mermaid call, hooked themselves upon curious bait, putting up a struggle that’s no struggle at all. They were the living, the wriggling and the surface light was coquettishly jiggling, yet they knew full well that they were not free and as they passed me, the saddest forever that could ever be, this is the moment we call ‘humanity,’ and like frightened fish they returned to the sea.

There, in a moment between him and me he gave me a chocolate éclair and the gooey cream filling got glopped in my hair, yet how to make myself care? I was happier because of it—

It’s the feeling that there is no fate! No way back down the halls that are lined with forgotten guitars and the shells of fallen stars, no way to undo the unending crawl or to erase the writing on the tunnel wall. Still, these are the moments reflected in a spoon, which shall not be leaving me soon, and are sweeter to remember than not, like the day I left on a finely timed clock and realized I too had forgotten my sock.

There is a spoon on a string hanging from the window opposite his with an almost daring sense of serene stirring up a melting kiss on the second day of spring. So silver, then so suddenly gone like shadow-man’s last song and though once I watched it tastefully turn as I lay sprawled upon his floor if I were ever to return it would be there no more. There is no way back down the halls that are lined with forgotten guitars and the shells of fallen stars, no way to undo the unending crawl or to erase the writing on the tunnel wall. Still, these are the moments reflected in a spoon, which shall not be leaving me soon, and are sweeter to remember than not, like the day I left on a finely timed clock and realized I too had forgotten my sock.
I was born in a hospital in Brainerd, Minnesota, a town about an hour outside of Minneapolis. It was an unusually humid July— even the white plaster walls of the maternity ward were coated in a thin film of sweat. Mom lay beside my crib, turning onto her side so she could watch me sleep. I imagine it was peaceful in that little room, despite the crying from behind the cloth partition separating us from a nameless woman who wasn’t happy about bringing a new mother into the world.

In the afternoon, my grandma visited us. She sat at the foot of the bed, and finished off the lunch of cold beef tongue and beer that mom couldn’t bring herself to eat. “The beer brings in your milk,” grandma explained, “just try to sip on it.” Later, my dad would sneak her roast chicken and haricots verts that he picked up from the market after work.

Dad’s promotion to the Caterpillar offices in Brussels meant he and mom had to move from their townhouse in the Chicago suburbs to a country whose language and culture they had only learned about in high school French class. They relocated during mom’s pregnancy to a farmhouse without a bathroom and outhouses. Grandma explained, “just try to sip on it.”

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Caught in love [Letters]

Eric Shoemaker

To [Moving out, back home, [my Home again]
I found two letters which I had not lost before
pressed snugly into my oak desk
from which the oak-paint peels, in shivers]

I know of letters,
and these letters, from you,
are the best revisit [Home again]:
(2010 was a round year to be birthed an adult
but a round face in an embroidered blue polo,
—–with khaki—–
I sat on a green hillock in a monastery, unapologetically seeming contrived
Not Speaking

I [re]open the envelope crinkled at the corner by your tears,
Smell of “old things” I used to hate [home again] hits me--
Can a literal wave of nostalgia hit me [every time, again]?
My name on the envelope in bright curls may be the only two words spelled correctly
But I laugh(ed) at the first lines [again]
And start(ed) to cry at the second.

[Pause. Soft edge of your quilt.]

I mov(ed) to some bushes–
(I hid in the bushes to read the rest— and I cried
at the Home I would never go back to)
[Yet here I am,
Moving Back Home again]

The second letter, much the same
Both so proud--
So proud of my embroidered polo and the round face
hiding inside, But where have I gone [yet] and from where I have come?
Is it knowing from where I/me came,

your backyards in the backwoods with shrapnel and miscarriage
and sleepy Graham Hill in a backwater town, with chickens,
That gives you this sense
That I will go and be something?

Is it your sense of self-loss or vicarious beliefs that says I will go be More?
Than you?

My weeping seems self-indulgent, and I don’t want [new] tears on these letters
just the originals, man and woman
trapped in love and wide-ruled paper.
No stamps.
Hands.)

I refit them [home again] snugly in my ratty Pantone book
and place that safely in my chest.

Back [Home] again.

(8)
Like when I am cold
and no wood is to be found and
no fire is to be made
and there is nothing but
blankets of quilted patchwork’s love like
When it is dark
and more light is needed until
nothing can be found
while my eyes adjust to
blankets of a floodlight’s intensity like
statements strung together of little known words
that do nothing to get to the truth of the matter are like those
blankets of smallpox
for those newly introduced
minor characters in history’s play
announced by beards with armors and spears
that don’t need to be thrown and
be lost to the lifeless body and
that stays forever held by the playwright
unless it’s taken from him
or better rendered useless without the bullets
you learn they shoot
from the bodies of compatriots
that serve as evidence.

But some of us develop a tolerance
to the Blankets’ hidden aim and
We will live to
work for our fire
and sleep easy and tired
while whatever love is burns
and shine lights too bright for dark
as white as you made them
who watch ants intently in midday’s sun
before taking out the magnifying glass
received as a gift.
Yes, those seeds will do well that you put in my ground
that you send from my branches back to yours.
Right me,
you self-assured Gods:
my smile once forced
is genuine
So cover me.
Nighttime Habbits

Michael Reinhard

My bed time is a strict 8:30pm, and for some reason neither Dad nor Mom ever breaks it. They make it seem like a maxim of life: when you are eight, you go to bed in the hour of eight. But rules are not always fast and steady with them. They say one thing and then another. When they do not give their permission, it is best to ask again later. Whenever I ask to go to a friend’s, Mom tells me to ask my father. Dad tells me to go ask Mom. They send me back and forth from one side of the house to the other, until I beg them to just give me an answer. They never say no. They understand the value of friends, or they understand the value of friends when one doesn’t have any. They cannot decide easily about scheduling play-dates, but when the clock strikes 8:29pm, they mechanically turn their heads and tell me to get off the computer and go to bed.

Once in bed, Dad turns out the light and leaves the room. I do not usually sleep without it, but if it is turned off, I cannot turn it back on because I am not tall enough. There is something, something lurking underneath my bed; or perhaps, it sits waiting in the closet; or underneath the clown wallpaper. Maybe it is gaseous and waiting outside the window to seep in and suffocate me. What if the window to seep in and suffocate me. What if night to harvest me as food? It is not unlikely!—mummies or vampires or zombies awaken in the night? It could be any sentence, and it would have to write it. I know the sentence is just coincidentally personal, that it could be any sentence, and it would have felt somehow personal. I want to be efficient. I write on the first line of the second page, I write on the second line of the second page, and then on the third line. I continue down the page until I have run out of lines. I start back at the first line and write will and copy it down on each successive blank. Sister Rachael barks Just keep going. I repeat the system on the front side and then the backside until it again goes blank. I am angry and upset. I want to be done with writing, but why won’t Sister Rachael let me stop? Instead, she uses her magic to wipe the pages clean and make me continue. My penmanship is awful. I am not meant to be a writer, but I keep on writing, and I grow irritated at every slashing w I write. My mind wanders, and I protest...

The classroom is bright like the sun with no identifiable source of light. I turn my head to shield my eyes from the full glint. Heart monitors line the walls and sound like metronomes. There is a chalkboard. I am sitting at a desk with fresh lined paper in front of me. Sister Rachael enters the room, and writes upon the board: I will write in between the lines. The letters are between the lines. She instructs me to copy the line on the second page, I write on the first line of the second page, and then on the third line. I continue down the page until I have run out of lines. I start back at the first line and write will and copy it down on each successive line. I have mastered the system.

I imagine I could be a factory worker with this efficiency. When I finish the second side, it goes blank. Sister Rachael barks Just keep going. I repeat the system on the front side and then the backside until it again goes blank. I am angry and upset. I want to be done with writing, but why won’t Sister Rachael let me stop? Instead, she uses her magic to wipe the pages clean and make me continue. My penmanship is awful. I am not meant to be a writer, but I keep on writing, and I grow irritated at every slashing w I write. My mind wanders, and I protest... Rules are not always the best. What is the point of writing? Talking communicates faster and more neatly. Talking doesn’t become blotted ink. It is not nearly as bound by form. I write upon this page with calm assurance: voice of a generation, voice of a generation, voice of a generation, voice of a generation. I hear the words spoken by my mother in my mind whose voice utters me forward with chants of Harvard, Harvard, Harvard. All of these words swirl around in my mind as I sit at the desk with my pen in hand and splinters sink deep into my pores. They would make scars as they entered the skin and became lost deep within the flesh. There would be painful twitches of wood bound within the body as splinters drove further to its core. Following the rules is easier than rebuke. Ink bleeds where the pen stands still. The letters are between the lines. Sister Rachael nods and gives her ascent. I move to the third line and repeat the sentence. I feel the mod again and continue writing down the page. Sister Rachael goes to the materializing desk in the back right hand corner and sits. She trusts me to follow the rules alone.

As I round the second page, I wonder what I’m writing. No reason was given, I was just thrust into the chair and given pen and ink—just instructed to write what was on the board. Anything could have been written there, and I would have to write it. What is the point of writing? Talking communicates faster and more neatly. Talking doesn’t become blotted ink. It is not nearly as bound by form. I write upon this page with calm assurance: voice of a generation, voice of a generation, voice of a generation, voice of a generation. I hear the words spoken by my mother in my mind whose voice utters me forward with chants of Harvard, Harvard, Harvard. All of these words swirl around in my mind as I sit at the desk with my pen in hand and splinters sink deep into my pores. They would make scars as they entered the skin and became lost deep within the flesh. There would be painful twitches of wood bound within the body as splinters drove further to its core. Following the rules is easier than rebuke. Ink bleeds where the pen stands still. The letters are between the lines. Sister Rachael nods and gives her ascent. I move to the third line and repeat the sentence. I feel the mod again and continue writing down the page. Sister Rachael goes to the materializing desk in the back right hand corner and sits. She trusts me to follow the rules alone.
Fig #1
We have had many conversations
in the fog hours of morning;
You lull me into the day, raconteur,
with stories of the bitter, velvet wasps
that sometimes burrow into your bulbous belly
and leave a limb behind

Fig #2
I have weathered the winter without
your nubile flesh,
gravid with green astringency,
irrigation, Western dirt,
honeyed interior tendrils—
like the stamens of honeysuckle
I sucked as a child—
and I have missed you.

Fig #3
Acquiesce, darling:
Your thick velutinous skin,
a hottentot venus against my lips.
My teeth cut through you,
as through soft wax at first,
then as through warm marmalade.
It's not circumcision
slowly spreading
into inflamed nodules
ant hills releasing lines
of acid-armored soldiers
drones carrying away
of acid-armored soldiers
ant hills releasing lines
into inflamed nodes
slowly spreading
It's a vat of porridge that if I could
burn
I would light my match
straight and clean
and set the whole thing on fire
and halt its growth
kill the tumor
but it would not be enough
and it was not enough before
there are soft dimples on my
stomach
a vat of porridge that if I could
burn
I would light my match
straight and clean
and set the whole thing on fire
and halt its growth
kill the tumor
but it would not be enough
and it was not enough before
there are raw red marks on my
scalp
dry scars that if I could heal
I would take my bottle of salve
straight and clean
and tenderly massage the
soreness
and mend the tearing
stop the breakage
but it would not be enough
and it was not enough before
there are red white specks on my
stomach
a vat of porridge that if I could
burn
I would light my match
straight and clean
and set the whole thing on fire
and halt its growth
kill the tumor
but it would not be enough
and it was not enough before

This is a New York love story. It’s not a love story
set in New York, although it is, and it’s not about
New Yorkers. It’s also not about New York food or
Village music, Alphabet City streets or city-neversleeps sounds, although they navigated all of those
things together while they lived there. This is a New
York love story. Get with it.
It starts in winter at the Opera, on a night when
you’d really want to be at the Opera. The gloaming
lights were going low and the orchestra was playing
those first few slow notes like a deep humming,
closing the room to the cold outside, when two men
blew in late like a snowstorm. She was already there,
sitting silently with a date who’d borrowed his hair-
do for the occasion, a coat folded neatly on the chair
beside her. Our guy slid in next to her because it
was his seat, and she moved her coat.
I’m late, he said, had to come all the way from
Brooklyn.
Hi, she whispered. And smiled.
He asked her to dinner, knowing she wasn’t
singe. She was new to the city and lost in her own
independence and said a tentative yes but a yes all
the same. She looked at the man she’d come with
to the Opera – he was a seat cover, a Sunday night
when there’s nothing on TV, a re-run you’d once
liked but couldn’t remember why you had.
So the next week she went out with the boy who
was late. He was nervous.
In a diner in a booth she told him in a low voice
about the boy near Sydney she’d been engaged to
and walked out on. New York was a fresh start, a new
version of herself. She was quiet, kind, intelligent in
a way that made her seem vulnerable. Over dessert,
and she loves dessert, she told him about the school-
house her parents owned in Australia, with the sheep,
the roses, the cast-iron bathubs. She missed it.
And when it was his turn, he didn’t know how
to frame himself. He told her that he worked in a
bank. His parents were Midwestern teenagers from a
Midwestern town. He’d escaped, gone to college,
spent his early twenties working his way around
Austrian farms until his German could pass for fluent
in financial interviews, and moved to New York with
crippling student loans and one shirt. She sat back.
One, she asked.
One, he said, because it was true. It was a shirt he
washed every night in the basin in his little apartment
to wear to the ten hours he spent in a cubicle every
day. She decided then that she liked him, and they
laughed as night spilled into the restaurant.
And he stopped laughing. Because he’d forgotten
his wallet, the Brooklyn Boy, surely the end. And
because she was wealthy, and she didn’t think about
her money impacting his opinion of her worth,
and because she was developing crush, she paid for
dinner. “Best investment I ever made,” she says now
when you ask her about it, hands wrapped around
the memory.
And then,
She invited him to Vermont to ski. They kissed
in the snow in the woods, all tangled up in each
other in a white movie-set under tree branches that
looked like long, black hands holding other hands.
On the long drive back to the city they told all of it,
all the secrets and stories, and then met for picnic
lunches lunch in Central Park, argued sometimes
about which art-house movies to see, and made
grey from scratch beside each other at the misty
store-top. She moved in.
She liked custard, dark green, and Van Morrison.
He liked German grammar, cooking, and being
right. They were New York because nothing about
them worked perfectly – there’s a grittyness, a
dirtyness in that love that grew out of a silent night
when you ask her about it, hands wrapped around
the memory.
And then.
She Who Must Be Obeyed is what he calls her
now, still laughing.
Your Old Man, your Brooklyn boy.
What do you know about quantum entanglement?

Nicole Cherry