



memoryhouse
fall 2017

issue no. 18

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clash

clash

In this issue of *Memoryhouse*, we invite you to grit your teeth and step into the crossfire of a **clash**. These pieces convey personal narratives of conflict and dissonance, exploring what happens before, during, and after a collision. Our authors reveal the clashes that occur between people on a gritty neighborhood street, inside a tedious office, and behind a bedroom door. Many of the narratives told here focus on the pain left behind after a clash, whether heart-break, wrenching grief, physical discomfort, or sheer terror. In these pages, you'll find pieces that capture the inexplicable moments when things don't fit together. We hope that this issue leaves you rattled but satisfied.



memoryhouse magazine

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memoryhouse is a quarterly student-run publication that curates the personal narratives of the uChicago community and beyond through creative writing and visual art. in addition, the organization features a performance ensemble called **memento** and hosts a variety of literary events, performances, and workshops each quarter.

to learn about joining memoryhouse or submitting work, please visit chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com

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july on 19th street

natalie rose richardson

You visit your father's new place— next to the Catholic church—& he parades you down the block, his hand owning the plot between your shoulders, while you nod to men with names like Jr. & Rico & QB: stoop-sitting, odd-job, wife-beater men, Tecate & Cuervo men, cross-bearing men who eye you soft when your father isn't around. But that's just how it is. Jr. fucks the neighbor girl all the time, hard, how she likes it, got caught & cuts her pops deals on blow. You know all the stories like you know your own tongue. Fourth of July, QB blockades the street with his Chevy & houses pool funds for plastic carnival stands to sell elotes, mango nada, plastic cups of sliced mango & pineapple sprinkled with tajín. Later, Jr. & Rico light fireworks in the street; all night the cylinders fire horizontally, blunting windshields & porches. The sound of bones cracking again, again. That's just how it is. Even your Wall Street, Civil War zealot father is one of these men. He's a risk-taking drunk. Recently out a job. Worships a dead language—I need you to understand—When I think of my father's new life, I think of Jr. & Rico, their dripping necks bent like hoses over the blooming firecrackers. The changing block, the pink line carving a path into & out of July on 19th Street.

When I think of what we've become, I see the parade: the lurch of bodies ducking from fire, bones cracking; a sweet taste cut with spice to make you spit your teeth. On a shelf, the books mapping our wounds gather unwanted dust; the church steeple outside horning its blade into the sky's pink.

mail dumped on desk

joan mcnerney



mechanical ethel
zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz
index cards slowly grow
from index fingers
staples pinch arms together
i toss my hair
tresses of paper clips

the boss posed
deciduously
"j, would you go to
the duplicating room..."
he has silver dollar eyes
& wears a pink shirt

scissor stepping down hall
did he say he wanted
a xerox of me?
an extra waitress
could come in handy
& there are never
enough good repairmen

well, i giggled into
orange paper bin
you'll have to
screw yourself,
my friend.



interstellar song

richard king perkins ii

I don't wish this upon you
but by the second day of spring, you'll be sad again.

I'm sorry for stating the obvious.

The best medicine is something beyond seasonal
and silent as interstellar song.

I don't need a moral loophole because the loophole
is your illicit behavior and my abiding interest.

I hope it's enough to overwhelm your common sense
and further need for Spanish mission sunlight.

Your hands are blunt stubs of internecine warfare;
touching yourself, punching yourself

will only take you so far from me.

It's an unusual thing to say we don't know each other
but still, we struggle to become even closer.

The Texas rain watches. It does not interfere.

We curl up together in our separate blankets of skin.

The moisture that leaves our eyes eventually dries
but remains a living thing.

he keeps speeding,
keeps getting stopped,
keeps getting taken away.



finding out my lover is in jail

cheryl kutcher

I can't turn the car from the 5 p.m. sun, an orange spotlight through the windshield. I can't stay on the phone because there is not much his sister can say except, "I'll call when I know more." I can't slow down because others expect me to move forward. This is only the beginning of beginnings. I can't change the details: he keeps speeding, keeps getting stopped, keeps getting taken away. I can't comprehend the danger of driving while Mexican. I can't call him but my pulse pushes my fingers toward dialing a familiar number, over and over and over. I can turn down the radio and wonder about the noise inside the other cars, if they are as quiet as they seem from here. I can clutch the phone in my hand, jump at every vibration. I can shiver in the shadows of trees I drive under, not often enough, and feel a brief reprieve from the glaring light and heat. This is the easy part. I continue driving, my muscles remembering which turns to make to get home.

shards

caroline carter

I've got shards in my stomach, shards from the stomach itself, so when it cuts food, it cuts itself. I think they must be glass, plenty thin and clear to slip past tests, but enough to gouge my insides, make me throw-up dinner and water and air, and do it every other night.

The thing about glass is that it reflects, so when people look at me, stomach full of glass, the first thing they see is themselves—not the shards, not me, just them and their own inscrutable pain. It takes focus to see behind glass at night, sitting at a dark picture window with someone on the other side. You've got to lean in close to do it honestly, or if not, at least know what you're trying to see. You've got to have a keyword, something to google when they've got their back turned. You've got to print out a picture and tape it up between, so you can tell it with a sympathetic smile: ah, I get what you mean.

But my shards have no name, no diagnosis, no WebMD entry to prove I'm being serious. All I've got are midnight hours of plastic bags and porcelain thrones and afternoons spent going to the hospital alone. So from the window's other side, I've got a perfect view, not of your shards, but of how you see mine, of whether you're looking at me or at your pain in my eyes.

soul arson

iris orpi

The pain would come later.
The blue and black bruises
the shape of man-sized fingers
would not form for another
few hours, and the heart
would not be aware
of the long coffin nails
until days after.

All of the moment is fear
a fast approaching end
that tastes like burning ash
and the red tint of sky
behind the death black
of a stormy night,
the panic while I teeter
on the brink of choking
and the realization
that he is too strong
and I can't push him off
and he is about to drain
the ocean out of my soul
without my permission,
my pounding heartbeat
incinerating the helpless
silence of the walls

my brain tries to shut down
as disgrace fell
the size of a hungry boar
and smoldering anthills
of self-doubt tear
my flesh apart
over and over and over
while I watch the crack of light
under the door not knowing
whether I am praying for
someone to walk in and see
my splayed nakedness, or
for the absolute non-appearance
of deliverance

and oh, I am tired
and bleeding and
worried about the stains
how many minutes has it been
and when will it end?

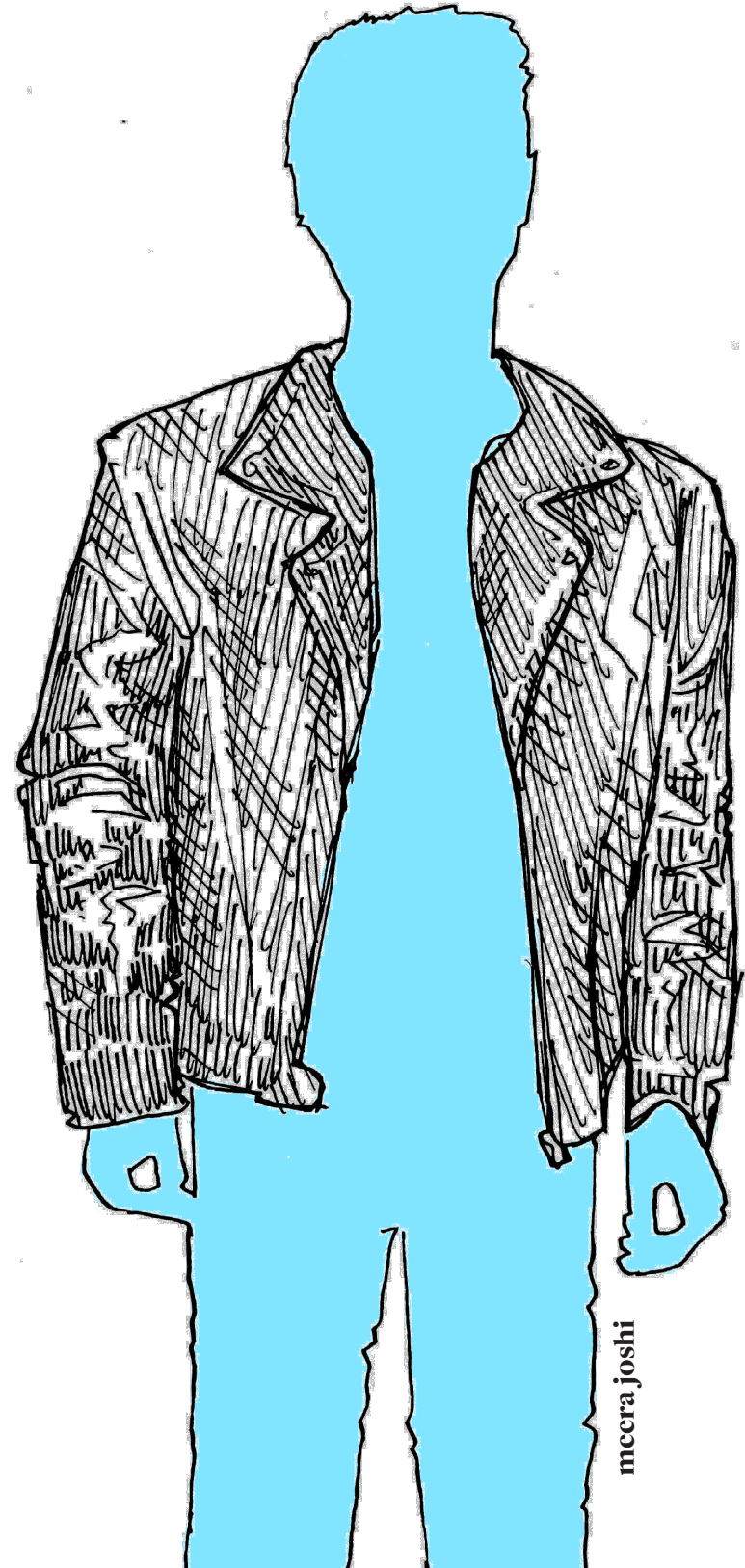
and is the floor falling
into the ceiling, and can
anyone hear the clock ticking?
every second is a "No"
unhonored,
mocked.
The mute terror sprouts
lesions of guilt and shame
that spread out
through the body like
fire devouring a house
while I am trapped inside,
hoping desperately that something
will be left to save
if I can't move
under his brutish weight
until the whole damned place
is razed.

All of the moment is fear
a fast approaching end
that tastes like burning ash
and the red tint of sky

my brother's black leather jacket

brian koester

A faint smell of pale electric blue zapped me, as soon as I touched it. I brought myself to pick it up. I was two, and he still a baby when they set him down in my lap to hold. All I could do was freeze, so I wouldn't drop him. Now his heavy jacket was just as hard to handle. The current traveled up my arms and blossomed: Despair, fear, drive and anger, what they must mean by *mixed-state agitated depression*. A stew boiling with unbearable flavor. I tried not to drop him. I really did.



meera joshi

the choice to remain in disrepair

iris orpi

He is a withered husk of a man
with his spirit permanently hunched over
slinking away in tiptoes
on family reunions
at the first sign of his ex-wife
or his children's arrival,
as if breathing the same air as the people
he had abandoned decades ago
were impossible
and would burn him alive.
His sons have grown
to be fine, upstanding gentlemen
who love their own kids
just a little too fiercely;
his daughters' trust issues with men
kept their needs complex,
streaked with defiance
and covetous of solitude.
They have divided forgiveness
among them, unevenly.
One swallowed it dry and found
it tasted like burnt pride.
Others carried it in their hands
until it softened
and rubbed it against their bruises.

The last one sat it on the shelf
for years, forgotten
until it took on the shape of a wedge
that he now uses to prop
his door wide open.

If only he would gather the words
and offer them. Maybe whomever
he had pawned his life to
would sell a part of it back to him.

He missed our wedding
and it was the first time
I saw my man weep.

He came to me, later
while I was recovering from childbirth
in a lovely little room with lilies
and whose windows let in the lake breeze,
healing my body with sleep
and ballads from Sugarfree.
He picked the time when his son
was away at work.
He wore a suit that reeked
of cigarette smoke and missed chances,
and all his words were drunk with sadness
no matter what he said.
He talked a lot but left
without saying anything.
And when he was gone
there was a dark imprint of hunger
that lingered where he had sat
and felt more tangible
than his presence had been,
reminding me of an empty womb
and my newborn son,
somewhere in the building,
being held and cared for
by somebody else's hands.





when he was gone
there was a dark imprint of hunger
that lingered where he had sat

this is how you lose him

sarah saltiel

You tell him that you love him for the first time in the dark, choking on the word and breathing it against his skin because you know that this word will be like poison. Maybe that's when the end starts, because really, you knew how the whole thing would go and you say it anyway, don't you?

You had said that you loved him before, just never in ways that got back to him. You announced it out loud to your roommates while lying drunk on the floor, and they just got those looks on their faces like won't you please just shut up about this

guy already, of course you're in love with him, we already knew that.

A few weeks later, you're lying in bed with him and tell him that you're going to write a story on his skin and in the middle of the story you write in your messiest handwriting I love you I love you I love you I love you, just to try the words out. You make sure to smudge the ink with your hand as you write so that when he looks down at his chest, there's no way that he can read those smudgy, messy, upside down words, nu-uh, no way in Hell.

Now it's eight months and you're whispering I love you to him in the

dark because he's the sort of type where nothing terrifies him more and your secret is that you're that type too. Gotta scare him off before he gets the chance to say it back, because you know that once he does, there's no way he's sticking around and so this is the way it's gotta be. You knew what you were doing, right?

You knew for sure the first time when you were sitting on his floor—all important things must happen on a floor. But you were sitting on his floor and he was drawing on his window with a marker, one of those erasable ones, trying to explain some math concept. You've never been big on math, don't have a brain for numbers and so you kept telling him that this doesn't fit in your head and he kept underlining the same thing, writing more numbers as if that would turn the unfamiliar familiar. He never went near the sun that you drew on the top right side of his window—he left that up there until the day he moved out and when the light shone through the window, there'd be an outline of the sun stretched out across his floor.

So he was trying to teach you math and you were trying to tell him that there are things in this world that make so much sense that you can breathe them in and out but math isn't one of them and he got so goddamned frustrated that he threw

a pillow at you. You couldn't stop laughing. You laughed so hard that you lost a piece of yourself to him and that was when you lost—

That was when you loved him.

In the months that passed, sometimes you would get so close to calling out to that piece, always in the moments that thinned the line between the things that you should and shouldn't say—in the last seconds before you both fell asleep, when you were singing quietly to him, or when you were clutching his body to yours and you felt like you just couldn't get close enough. In those moments you held your I love you's on the tip of your tongue, had to catch them there when they flew up from the back of your throat.

Because maybe he loved you. Or maybe he didn't. But he needed aloneness, needed to exist in the mindspace of being alone even as he physically held you close. He didn't need you. Even if he loved you, he wouldn't have known it. And you knew that.

So you didn't say anything for months and choked down your words. When you went on walks with him, you would pick flowers and when you left in the mornings, you left them on his desk, his chair, by his window. You left them, hoping he would find them later and think of you, and maybe he would know that they weren't the only things that you left behind.

But you always knew that he was going to be the one doing the leaving and so it took you four months to let yourself love him and eight months to tell him that you did because there were things more precious to you than saying the words that clutched at your insides. And when you did, it took him two weeks to say goodbye.

The first thing is the essay—he tells you that it's got to get done and so he won't be seeing you much that week and you don't argue because you don't want to be that type of girlfriend—the real clingy type, and so you tell him no problem, and tell yourself that things are fine. Everything's fine.

He comes over after the essay is due and you have sex (probably, though you've been together long enough that you don't really remember the individual times and what happened when) and your roommates turn the volume on the tv up and afterwards you lie in bed and ask him if things are alright, if he's happy. He tells you not to worry about that now, that it's not something to be anxious about. That's probably the second thing.

Then it's four days later and he calls you asking to come over and he doesn't even have to say it for you to know that it's over, he just sits on the bed and tells you that he's sorry. Then of course you gotta start bawling because you've never been good at keeping your cool with these sorts of things and then he's crying

too and that shocks you enough that you curl up next to him and hold his head to your chest saying baby, it's going to be okay, baby, I love you and it's going to be okay. Not that saying I love you makes anything better, it never did. So there you are, the two of you, crying in your room, unable to say the words that would make anything better because I love you is all that you can say and I don't love you is the only thing he can. And all you can think of is how it had been going well, not stupid rom com go splashing barefoot in the fountain well, but he'd been seeming like a person falling in love. You'd woken up one morning to find him looking at you, smiling, and you'd squinted your eyes shut and pretended to still be asleep so he didn't feel like he was doing it for you, but could keep feeling whatever he was feeling for him. But now you're crying and he's crying and you're just really wishing that you hadn't said I love you.

Now he's not real good with emotions, and you always knew that. You wished that he would get excited about you the same way he got really excited about hard math problems but he never did and that was fine. And anyway, you felt happy when you got to lay on his bed, half asleep, and he played the guitar for you because he was excited about showing you the new songs he'd learned. And you could send him pictures of the cats that you ran into on the streets and

even though he hates cats, he would ask you what you named them, and stupid shit like that, and that was sort of enough.

You wished that he would get excited about you the same way he got really excited about hard math problems.

Every morning you stayed over, he'd have class before you did and would let you sleep in so you'd leave him a note on his desk-- a drawing or a joke or a list of things that made you happy (a list that he was always on). When he breaks up with you he tells you that he's kept every note. Why does he tell you that? And now you're crying and your roommates are giving you that look, like oh no, we're going to have to watch over her for weeks aren't we? One of them even texts him to tell him to give you space, but god, you can keep it together, sort of.

You tell them that you're fine, fine, and then you fall over yourself through the next two weeks and you need a goddamned sign on your door saying this room has gone 36 hours without bursting into tears. For the first week, you just about don't leave the house except to go to class and do your goddamn civic duty and vote (Trump wins, because

of course Trump wins.)

The next week you sit in the sun with a really good sandwich and that's probably the highlight of the whole week. You go to a party and drink a little more than you should, but still not enough and bring home some guy, real tall guy. He's drunk enough that he tells you about his parental issues and so maybe he understands what it's like to have a week and a half in pajamas wanting to hide in your bed. He spends three hours talking to you, hopefully because he's drunk and not because he likes you, before you get impatient and kiss him for a whole two minutes before then kicking him out of the house.

He didn't stay over? Your roommate asks when he finds you sitting on the kitchen floor crying. You say I wasn't planning on sleeping with him. Even though you probably were, but your roommate is probably getting a little bit tired of your wallowing. He helps you up from the floor and you go to your room, trying not to step on any of the creaky floorboards, wondering if you said I love you because you meant to destroy things, or because you didn't, and wondering which one's worse.

The writing of this story was inspired by Junot Diaz's short story, This is How You Lose Her (2012, Riverhead Books).

i am junk

joan mcnerney

dirty city dirty junk
once i was useful
passed from 1 hand
to another dragged
thru his desire & hers
pushed down

who threw me here
putting a needle of
lead in my brain?
lead completely then
left thrown on this dump
a piece of leaden junk

how long will i
lie here lie here
the heroin/e?
with heavy body
full round sobs
cold hideous
why can't i cry out?

contacts

cheryl kutcher

I.

He was arrested wearing contacts. At the end
of the visiting room, I lean on the thin bar,
slouch close to the circle of metal gauze
punctuating the glass window. I can't see
him when I turn my head to listen,
and when I face him, my tear ducts
betray me, spreading liquid over lenses
like ice slinking over a black pond. His eyes
watering from the chemical burn
from sleeping with his contacts in, he begs
me to bring him his blue-rimmed glasses.

II.

I lean over the counter, no glass barrier shielding me or the officer, who inspects the cleaning cloth, unfolds and refolds the fabric. I am glad I did not smooth the sappy love poem into the case lining, to be returned as an embarrassing, futile gesture, a denied hug. The humiliation of an officer handing me something

I do not want. I read somewhere once that love can conquer most things but not the judicial system. Still, I thought someone would notice the love radiating from my being like solar flares, that gates would unlock because of the energies pulsating with enough power to disrupt

technology. Now, solar flares are nothing before the law. These closed doors are sealed by reluctance, fear he will be punished on my behalf if I try to reach. I cannot grip a handle, swing a door inward, grant myself access: though he resides here, this place is not home. Opening these doors would be like pushing a palm through the building's foundation.

The officer snaps the case closed, passes the eyewear into the white, empty hallway, where no one is wearing glasses.

III.

He stands there, against the white hallway wall, a thick glass door and dark, square room separating him from the officer, from me. The door is open, and I wave goodbye, finally able to see him without smudged glass between our fingertips, hear him without metal connecting our breath, our prayers, but he does not look at me, one hand wrapped around the small, unopened case.

still life with coyote

brian koester

Our train stopped
far from any town
so another could go.

It's more important
to move freight
than people. The other

train was long,
and while we waited
our engineers left

because they were scheduled
to. We waited

while another crew was scrounged.
The train was shut down,
and the sun baked

us like potatoes in foil.
We were warned not to go
outside so we wouldn't

be left behind.
There was no sound

of any machine.
Out the window
A coyote pup was on his back

by the track as if
the sun was so delicious

he had to soak it up.
His coat matched
the grain that was waving

from the train to the whole horizon.
No blood anywhere.
He looked as wholesome

as any child's stuffed dog.
I couldn't move
far enough along

the train to get away
from the smell.



mccra.joshi

breaking point

joseph murphy

Women fill shopping carts with stones.

A man stares at his empty hands;
another kicks over a table
and runs from his home; a child
grasps for breath,
pacing from window to window.

Birds are born without wings.

A school of fish are found rotting
at the foot of a tree;

one war takes the shape of another;
then another.



amy bassin