

# memoryhouse magazine

winter 2021 || issue no. 24

READ



TRV

YOUR



IT

FORTUNE



AGAIN

*albeit*

# albeit

Although; even though; used to supplement information that reduces the importance of what was said. In this issue of Memoryhouse, our contributors explore the theme *albeit* through a variety of memoir-style creative nonfiction pieces. These works transcribe moments of pause, insight, and attenuation.

## memoryhouse magazine table of contents • winter 2021

body poem .....	7
marco harnam kaisth	
underground play .....	8
thomas zampino	
new jerusalem .....	9
shahe mankerian	
one .....	10
luisa giulianetti	
in memory of exoskeletons .....	12
rebecca cuthbert	
double-parked at a roundabout .....	14
marco harnam kaisth	
two o'clock .....	16
susan wolf	
sound box cackles .....	19
reema saleh	
goodbye, raven, goodbye .....	20
melanie han	
street seens .....	22
joseph farina	
spill .....	24
josef steiff	
when you are dying of your own choice .....	28
kathryn malnight	
old habits .....	33
shahe mankerian	

# memoryhouse staff

## print

### *editor-in-chiefs*

bradley tian  
kathleen cui

### *editorial board*

bradley tian  
kathleen cui  
marisol sobek  
vanessa ma  
victor liu

## design

### *design editor*

kathleen cui

**memoryhouse** is a quarterly student-run publication that curates the personal narratives of the uchicago community and beyond through creative writing and visual art.

to learn about joining memoryhouse or submitting work, please visit [chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com](http://chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com)

*special thanks to tristin lee atwood, provider of the original photo for this issue's cover*

founded 2012, alida miranda-wolff



kathleen cui

# body poem

*marco harnam kaisth*

Mooncurved morning:

you know in your legs, you  
know in your red streaked eyes

that Love's touch  
lives under your skin

in that ruddy, bloody part  
of you where no one dies

and no one leaves.

# underground play

*thomas zampino*

I see you most mornings on the subway  
seated in that very same place. You take  
up more than your share of space. Brawny,  
bearded, some might even call you a badass  
with that gold earring and thick chain hanging  
low. But we all know your little secret, we see it.  
The look on your face, the gestures, give it away.  
Yesterday, you twisted your head down so that the  
little boy you carried in that stroller could reach  
up to play with your hat. And then he smiled  
at you with that one tooth smile. And you  
returned it. Then you saw me watching  
you both, right before you got off,  
just as we both nodded.  
knowingly.

# new jerusalem

*shahe mankerian*

Mama's porcelain memory, like a broken demitasse,  
needs mending with a thin scar of gold. She may

walk the streets with silver earrings and high heels  
like an unhinged bride searching for her husband.

Dear God, if she seems lost, peering into pearly  
peepholes or squatting over sterling sewage pipes,

be patient. The map of New Jerusalem corrodes  
inside her cloudy mind; she favors the shellshocked

alleyways of Beirut. So, when she looks disoriented  
or bamboozled, she might grab the recoiled snake,

thinking it's the holy staff or her carousing husband  
flickering his forked tongue inside her clenched fist.



# one

*luisa giulianetti*

One minute. No breath.  
The young refugee gives birth, counts  
seconds like years, prays this one will live.

My brother's grand mal. Eyes roll up, press  
against his sockets. Shakes. Jerks. One  
minute-thirty-two. Red ball still in the street.

The minute your mouth compassed

mine, I was gone. Days later,  
apricot and honeysuckle spooled my tongue.

70 beats,  
5 liters. Morning glories unravel  
pre-dawn scarlet. Full bloom burst.

One minute. One terrorist. Four girls.  
Sunday school fresh and pleated, stilled  
in the rubble of 16th Street Baptist.

One minute. One terrorist. Seven  
dead. And the next minute, and the next.  
Ten more.

Michael Brown.  
Tamir Rice.  
Stephon Clark.

4000 flaps of a hummingbird's  
wing. 1800 exploding stars.  
600 rounds.

Measureless minute. The baby gasps. Twin  
cries ring the camp like starlight,  
like pray.

Decades later, in a land still-foreign,  
he holds her, counts each labored breath  
per minute. She whispers:

remember me.  
We are never guaranteed the next  
One.

in  
memory  
of  
exoskeletons

*rebecca cuthbert*

And there it goes—another shingle chipped off,  
chiseled away this time by the righteous cliché of a baby’s stunned  
laughter, and  
in Trump America, I’m lying naked on the banks of a mosquito-  
clogged swamp  
and the hungry bastards are full of malaria,  
pink eye and mad cow disease.

He’s not my first nephew,  
I wasn’t a great big sister, but watching my baby brother’s baby  
shriek joy and kick fat legs is somehow brand new,  
a sneaky tectonic shift  
that moves everything in my life two disorienting inches to the left.  
Vertigo.

I watched a Facebook video featuring a Sulcata tortoise  
whose shell had been damaged in a house fire. Chunks missing,  
mottled flesh exposed  
to cruel breezes and sunshine, but do-gooders made him a 3-D  
printed shell  
and it seemed to do the trick.

I’ll have to watch less news, drink more, but Darwinism  
will eventually claim me, soft and angry  
wrapped in layers of beige cardigan sweaters that aren’t helping, and  
by then I’ll probably  
go so quietly.

# double-parked at a roundabout

*marco harnam kaisth*

I am spread thin but happy across this land:  
these open states of simple geometry.

Between Chicago and Kentucky I've turned triangled,  
easy love beating between my wrists, corn ahead & behind.

There is a simple forever lurking in this uncurved pre-dental,  
this petty slant and slope of selfsloughing days sloughing  
to mudrut mud, of love around,

obvious in the way the cruelty of children is obvious,  
or how, in a cartoon, a sheet can always be ripped away,  
and often a face can too.

Let us talk now, love, of other things. Of pinions and nodes;  
of dark places reaching, where first joints cup and form.



lada valkova



# two o'clock

*susan wolf*

I wake up and look at the clock. 2 A.M. The nurse swoops in with my twelve-hour-old son.

"Look who's awake!"

But I already expected them. With mom instinct thousands of years old, I knew Andrew was awake, patiently waiting for someone to carry him to me. The nurse settles us in and swoops back out, the hall light glowing and then gone.

In our little circle of bedside light, Andrew and I gaze at each other with wonder. Born so quickly, his face looks almost smushed. His eyes will swell shut by morning, but I don't know that yet. Purpley and calm, it's as if he acknowledges his rush to arrive.

Almost three years ago, his sister was immediately whisked

away after her birth—a different kind of purple, no one calm. Rachel did not get this gazing time. At least not that first night. It's not the same later, is it?

I cherish this sliver of quiet. Knowing already how quickly this babyness vanishes, I gaze, study and memorize every inch of him. In his eyes, I look for clues. Who will he be like when he grows up? Me? His dad? I feel kindness in his not-so-little form. Mmmm...baby smell. He's not hungry. I don't care. We gaze some more, hanging the stars and moon for each other. The hospital noises fade away. Time passes, and then the nurse swoops back in to take him away.

"Can't he stay?" I protest, suddenly fiercely protective.

"You need your sleep now," she says, sensibly. She swoops back out, taking my bundle of

daydreams with her.

Many years later, I open my phone and look at the screen. 2 P.M. The text message comes in with a peaceful ding.

"FYI. Andrew in jail again."

But I know this already. My mom instinct twenty five years old, I know my son is in custody, impatiently waiting for someone to bring him home. Guilt flutters in, I shoo it back out. The day's light glaring, and then gone.

The little square of words shouldn't be a cause for wonder. Still, the news clobbers my heart. I will face the world with swollen eyes tomorrow. This I already know. Pale and breathless, I acknowledge my failure to divine the future.

I heard the news from Rachel—a different kind of

child, no one's fool. She is not sympathetic, at least not anymore. It's not the same after that first night.

In the quiet, I hold my breath. Knowing how quickly word gets around, I pull up the sheriff's Facebook page. I look for clues. What happened this time? Did he fight with his dad? He's too much like me in too many ways, according to my ex-husband. The comment thread is cruel. He's a kind man, I want to tell them. The street noises fade away. Guilt settles back in.

"Can't I fix this?" I ask Rachel.

"He made his bed—he can lie in it," she replies.

She swoops back out, and with her go my bundle of broken dreams.



# sound box cackles

*reema saleh*

Loud clustered chokes  
Spill down the stairs,  
Croaking that rips through  
The air and keeps our parents  
Complaining up at night.  
For homemade comedy  
& ruining childhood delights  
& the warm spot you leave  
On my spotted twin bed  
& sometimes only for you.

Change each other's names,  
Respect our phases,  
Resent the absence when  
Life calls the other, but  
Miles away and now you're here.  
Past the other end of the  
computer,  
The blanket shrouds your face,  
One-fold piles another, cloaks  
you  
In cotton fluff half-past two.  
The blue light eyes me  
With a twinkle, the sun  
Peeks past the window crack.

Miles away, and you're still here.  
Your face is softer, I think,  
The tracks on your forehead  
Are gone, the bumps on  
Your chin are the same dull  
Gray as your favorite wall,  
The patches flatten out,  
The lighting takes you away.  
My voice echoes into the sound  
box,  
Losing itself over loose  
connections.

Let your chatter litter my  
Voicemail 'til it blinks "almost  
full,"  
'Til your messages make a  
Chorus I can't erase.  
Pray that rapid-fire video calls  
Keep us in sweats & yelling  
Over each other,  
Babbling, reaching together,  
For words we don't yet  
understand.

# goodbye, raven, goodbye

*melanie han*

I saw a raven the other day, and the way its wings gleamed in the sun reminded me of how your hair used to change from blue to green to purple and back.

You had the most stunning hair: thick, silky, straight, so black it caught the light and played tricks with it when you moved. “It’s chal-lang chal-lang,” Grandma, whose hair you inherited, would boast.

I ended up with Dad’s hair: thin, tangled, stringy, not quite black, but a muted brown, reminding our relatives of a malgalgi, the mane of a sick horse. Koreans are rude like that sometimes.

You taught me how to French braid, Dutch braid, fishtail, waterfall, thinking I wanted to learn to do my own hair, but I just enjoyed touching, brushing, and playing with yours.

So on that morning when I walked into your room with Dad, it wasn’t your papery skin or your cheeks, your eyes or your arms that made me run outside. It was your head.

Where your thick, silky, straight, and jet black hair should have been, there was only the reflection of the room’s bright and fluorescent overhead lights.

Even though Dad told me not to, I went home that day, dug through our kitchen drawers for the largest pair of scissors, then, I hacked away at my hair, chopping off 12, maybe 13 inches,

of it, reflection blurred by tears. If you couldn’t have hair, I didn’t want it either. My long hair deserved an end, your life didn’t deserve the same.

I still make the big chop once my hair gets to the length that it was during the summer of 2008, the year that everything changed: your hair, my hair, your life, my life.

I often find myself looking for ravens and watching their wings shimmer. My hair has gotten long again. I swear it grows faster each time, knowing I’ll say goodbye.

# street seens

*joseph farina*

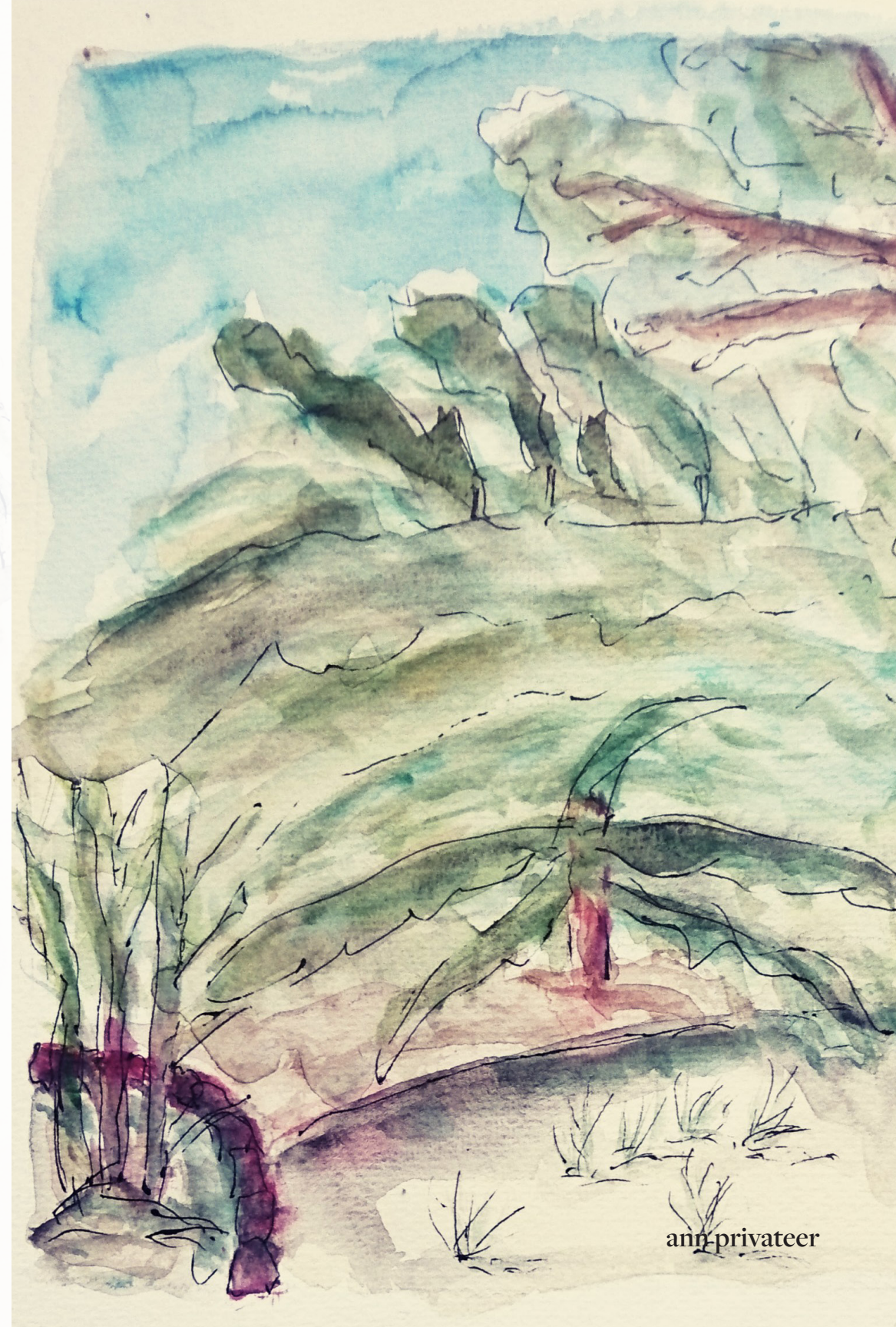
on honey coloured autumn afternoons  
I'd walk slowly home from school  
the air warm but pungent from the  
refineries distillation stacks

lake freighters plying the river  
sound their saluting horns  
as they approach the narrows  
into the expanse of lake huron

my disparaged street covered with leaves  
lawns littered with horse chestnuts  
a feast for foraging squirrels  
intent on their winter storage

pneumatic hisses from holmes foundry  
sound every few minutes striving for production  
ending only when the closing whistle whined  
time enough then to sit on porches

waiting for my father to return from work  
reading comics, sorting hockey cards  
imagining a life, beyond the sentence  
of the street



ann privateer

# spill

*joesf steiff*

**T**onight the kitchen light spills across a corner of the living room, like the beam of some lighthouse that assures you of where you are but says nothing of where you're going or where you've been. We're making love, and her DNA drips into the carpet. It will remain there long after we've left.

Two months ago we broke off our engagement, but we still live together.

Tomorrow she will ask me if I still love her.

Two and a half years ago, we kissed for the first time, but only after I told her that I had been with both men and women.

Fourteen months from now, I will be laying on this very spot, the dry carpet scratchy against my back. I will stare up at the ceiling, the phone lying next to

me. I will keep dialing the first six digits but never the seventh. I will tell myself that I will call him tomorrow.

Two years ago we made love for the first time. The medallion around my neck became slick and wet as I went down on her, and all through the next day, I pulled it up from under my shirt and sniffed it, smelling her scent, sometimes slipping the cool metal disk into my mouth.

Earlier tonight we picked up the dirty dishes from last night's party to celebrate her graduation from sign language. Several of my friends from the office were here; I work for Child Protective Services, balancing a caseload of severe abuse with severe neglect. At the end of the evening, she sat right here while I went to fill her glass with wine. When I came back from the kitchen, she was signing to my co-worker across the room, each of them using

their hands to sing along to The Rose. Three years from now, they will buy a 200-year-old house. It will have the original gaslight piping in the walls and smell of damp brick and wood. I will visit them only once, when her brother is in town, and realize we have nothing left to say.

Two years from now, my specialization will be depression and suicide, especially among adolescents. When I was 15, I learned everything I would need to say.

One year ago her parents told her that they thought I was directionless.

Four months ago our families decided it was too scandalous for us to live together in a small rural town. We had to get married.

Three weeks from now, she

will move out, and I will live here alone.

Nineteen months ago, we visited my mom, staying at my childhood home, though unlike at her parents', we had to sleep in separate rooms. One afternoon my mom came home early from work. I pulled out, frantically trying to stuff my erection back inside my pants, leaving my shirt untucked to cover the bulge. I remember her tugging her jeans up in a slight jumping movement. By the time my mom was at the front door, we were back in the living room. She is the only person I ever had sex with in my mother's house.

One year from now, my mom will threaten to burn my bed because she's sure I slept with David in it.

One year ago we were traveling across the country. We stayed at a motel, but we didn't have any condoms. She told me

# spill *cntd.*

that it was okay if I pulled out. The sheets were still wet that morning. I was embarrassed when we ran into the maid on our way to the car.

Ten months ago she told me she might be pregnant.

Five years ago she had an abortion. She never told that boyfriend.

Two months from now she will ask me why we made love tonight.

Five months ago I built the desk and shelves that she will take with her when she moves out. Six years from now she will chop them up for firewood.

Fourteen months from now I will receive a phone message that David is in town and wants to see me. I will lay here on this very same patch of floor, unable to dial the 7th digit. Instead I will get high.

Fifteen months ago we attended a workshop on sexuality together. She wanted to learn more about homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality. I'm not sure we learned anything new.

Ten years ago she lived in one of the largest cities in the USA, I lived on a farm and David lived in suburbia. David and I first met when my mom and I went to visit his recently divorced father, a former classmate of my mom's from high school. David was exactly my age, and we spent the entire weekend camped out in the basement reading comic books and listening to the Carpenters.

Three months ago we visited New York to check out possible locations for our wedding. One night, her family decided on pizza for dinner. They told me to order it. When I asked what kind, they made fun of me for not knowing that a real pizza only has cheese.

On our second date, my mother was in town for a conference and called my apartment repeatedly. At breakfast the next morning, I lied about where I had spent the night.

Eighteen months ago I met her parents. We went to visit them at their new home in Florida; it was only the third house to be completed. Wooden skeletons of future homes lined the streets. The first night there, we sneaked out to the beach and made love, the grainy grit of sand smooth and soft in comparison to the tiny teeth of sand mites. The next night, I helped her father steal bricks from the construction site.

Whenever David came to visit his grandparents, we would go over, and I would get to see him. I think his father was my mom's unrequited love.

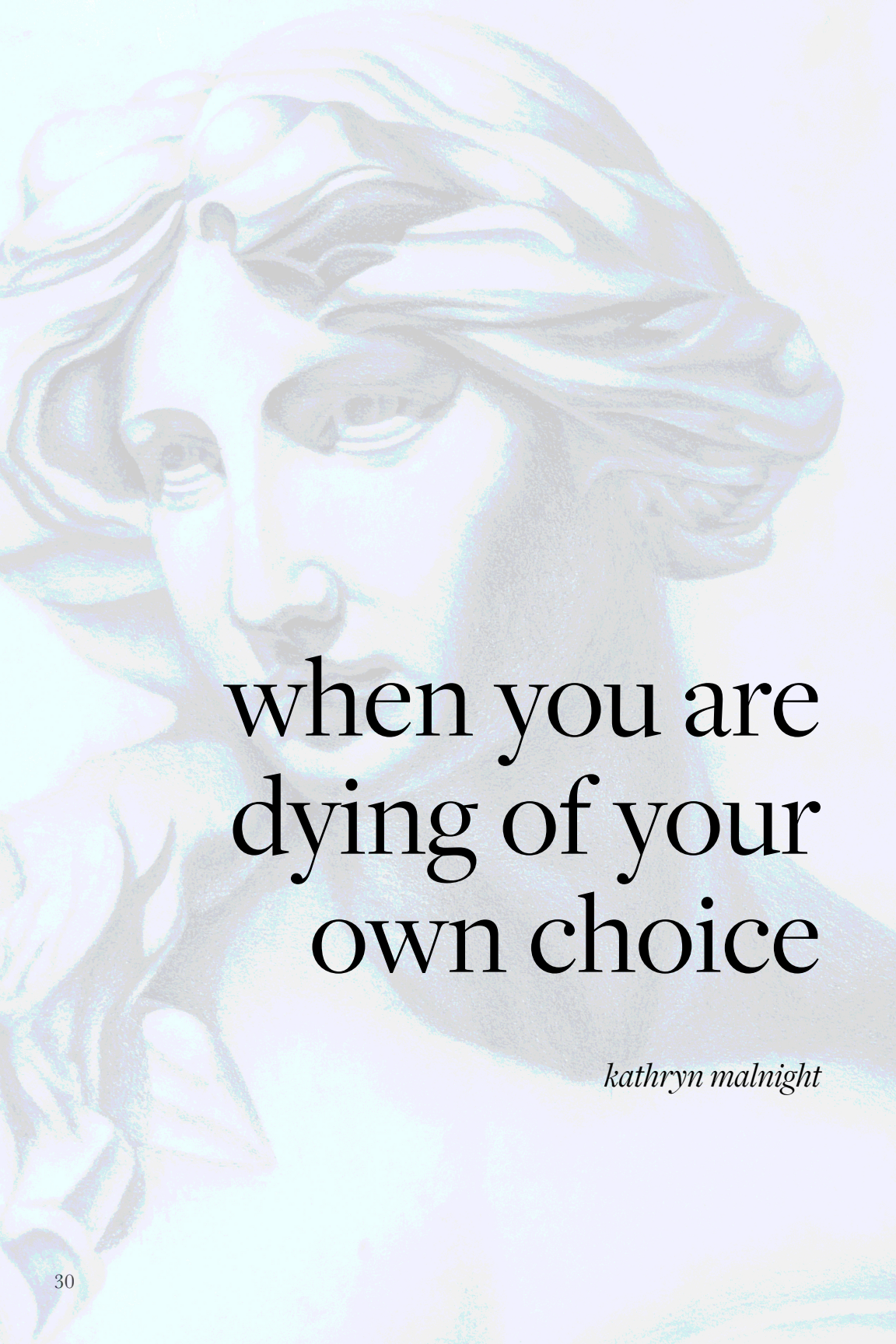
Nine months from now, she will throw me a surprise party.

I will be surprised but not in a partying mood. I will have just spent the entire day at the hospital with a 5-year-old boy with burns covering 90 percent of his body. His mother no longer wanted him and set fire to their house with him in it.

One year from now, my mother will be waiting outside my office after work and ask me to sit in the car with her for a while. Rain will beat down in thumping pellets and dull thuds against the roof and windshield. My mother is not happy that I am spending so much time with David. She will ask me if he's gay. I will tell her she should go ask him. And then I will answer the question she didn't ask.

Eighteen months from now, his parents will leave me a phone message that he has killed himself. They will have waited until after the funeral to call.

In some alternate universe, we would be married by now.

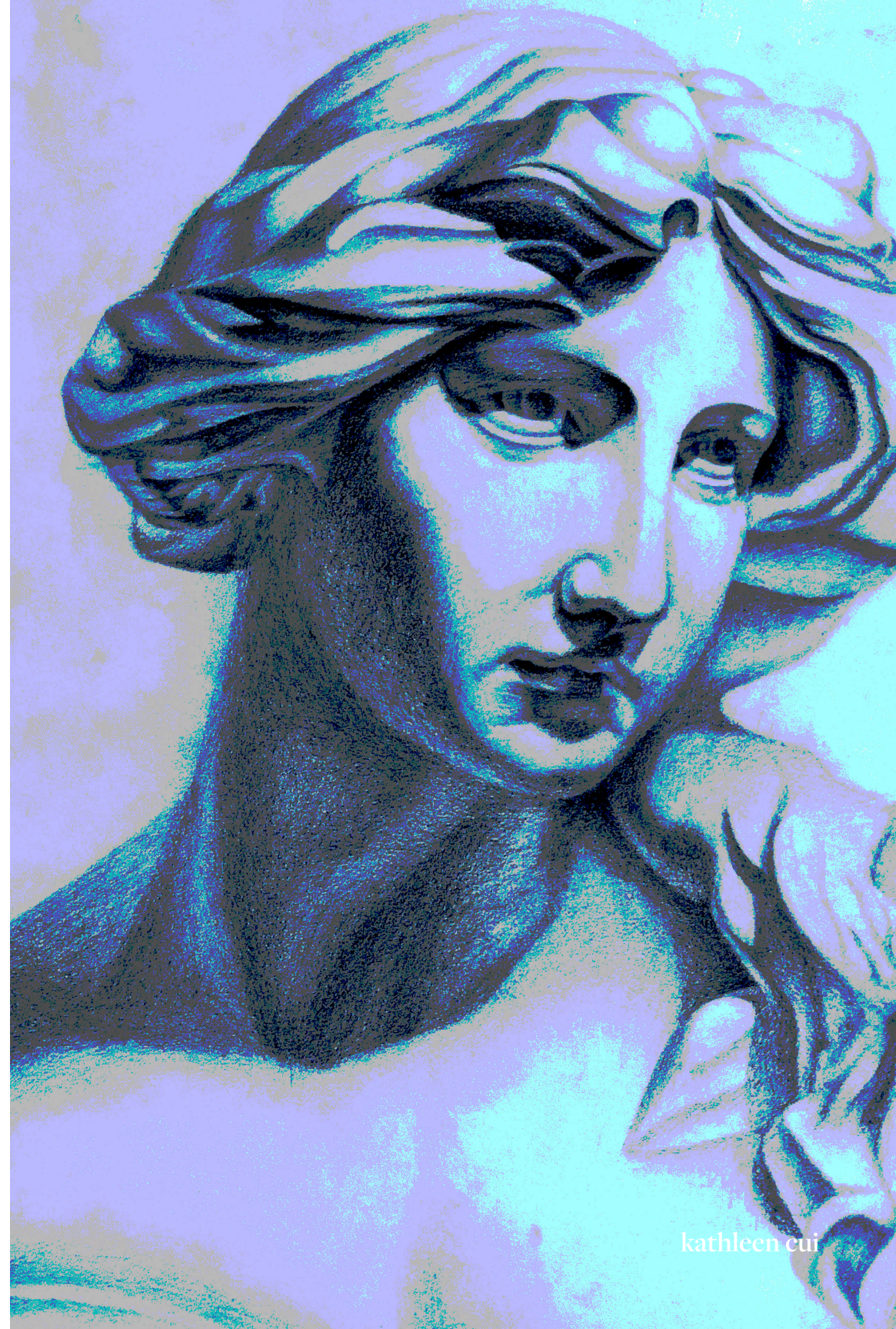


when you are  
dying of your  
own choice

*kathryn malnight*

I sleep for what seems like years,  
stuck under closed eyelids and the  
aching of my exhausted belly.  
I chew and spit meager portions of  
salmon, pasta, chicken -  
and when a morsel is swallowed,  
I slam my head against the wall until They  
come running,  
block me with their knees, pin me to my bed  
as I thrash and shriek in enraged fury and  
overwhelming sadness.  
Staff try sending me to the ER, and I fight  
them till I'm tied to the stretcher.  
I talk my way out of being an Emergency  
with IV fluids and a stale hospital cookie.  
The other girls watch me crash, and I see  
them struggle yet somehow rise.  
I do not buy into this game of Recovery, the  
doctors with their clipboards chorusing:  
Eat. You will feel better. I know this, but I do  
not want to "feel better."  
I like this constant headache, this  
neverending reminder that I am Dying -  
there is freedom in feeling invincible to  
treatment, feeling dominant over hunger -  
choosing to end it despite everyone telling  
me to stay.  
I agree to three cups of red gatorade, which I  
promptly throw up upon consumption.  
I relish in the awfulness of malnourishment,  
convince myself the pain is beautiful.

Until one day, I awake to a crowd, a feeding  
tube, and a restraint bag.  
A judge has pronounced me “incompetent to  
make medical decisions,”  
and This is the Plan.  
They are to tie me down and forcibly shove a  
tube down my nose.  
They are to leave me for hours with a drip of  
a nutritional supplement running,  
and they will do this until I comply.  
I did not know, this would be the end,  
and subsequently, the beginning.  
I scream at my doctor, I flail in the firm hands  
and taut arms of gentle eyed nurses.  
Interim begins.  
Looking back on it, on the time I spent  
fighting,  
I can’t help but pity this broken edged girl,  
who lived in the mouth of trauma.  
Recovery is a process that ebbs and flows,  
it is not linear, nor easy - somehow I  
withstood it.  
I turned my death wish into an unquenchable  
thirst to live.  
I ate grease laden pepperoni pizza with a  
friend yesterday,  
and I didn’t Google the calories before  
relishing in the taste,  
in fact, I didn’t particularly care at all.



kathleen cui





# old habits

*shahe mankerian*

Mama, do not pluck a feather from your angel wings  
to dust the chandelier or the top of the refrigerator.

The halo should not be used as a trivet or a coaster.  
Turn off the burner, release the steam, and let the  
okra

cool in the pressure cooker. Last night, you left  
a glass of ouzo on top of the leather-bound Bible.

The stain is permanent, like the drizzle of olive  
oil on your dazzling white robe. The solvent under

the sink cleanses sinful hearts. It's not chlorine  
bleach.

Use it under duress and only when Father walks in.