

UARTIER



alexandar james



*for little me
you are worth every bit of effort,
and you will always be enough.*



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✧ *foreword, from someone i trust* ✧

Alexandar, my beloved partner, first told me they were writing this chapbook around one year ago. At the time, I wasn't sure what form their words might take nor what topics would be explored. Since then, I've seen them through hardships, joys, and connecting times. But, perhaps most importantly, I've been with them through moments of growth. I've seen them battle through trauma and hardships that would embitter so many and transform it into love and compassion for their fellow human.

Every time I read through their work, I feel hardship and pain illuminated, heard, understood, and learned from. I am reminded each experience may add weight to our journey, but also provide a seed ready to take root and ground us to develop into a better and more well rounded version of ourselves. I hope you will join me in reading their work and discovering a piece of the journey I am so inspired by every day.

For my love, thank you for choosing to walk this journey with me. I look forward to planting many memories together, laying down the roots of our love, and growing together into the best versions of ourselves we can be. I love you Alexandar.

Michael

quarter

when I was young, the mountain called to me,
asking if I could imagine my fingertips brushing
against the sky, tangling clouds, and
meeting the sun.

I hadn't lost my baby teeth yet, and my skin
did not know the consequences of being cold.

the clouds looked fat and tempting, marshmallows
against cotton candy swirls. the sun
was a stray lemon drop, a treat for a mouth
looking to settle its craving.

"you would be such a big help," the mountain whispered,
and I could only sink my hands, soft with youth
and naivety, into the milky sky.

children's bones are not built to carry the weight of the world.
they never heal properly when snapped under that pressure.

my shoulders are buckled. I do not recall
what it is like to be warm. I miss my brother,
my father, my
mother.

it is not the mountain who controls the rain
nor the snow, nor the long days being beaten
with the heat of the sun. I can swat the clouds
or puff at the birds, but I am not the one to control
anything. I am only swallowing the consequences
of being young.



I miss a loving touch, I miss a hand petting my hair,
I miss the safety of my head on my mother's lap. I miss

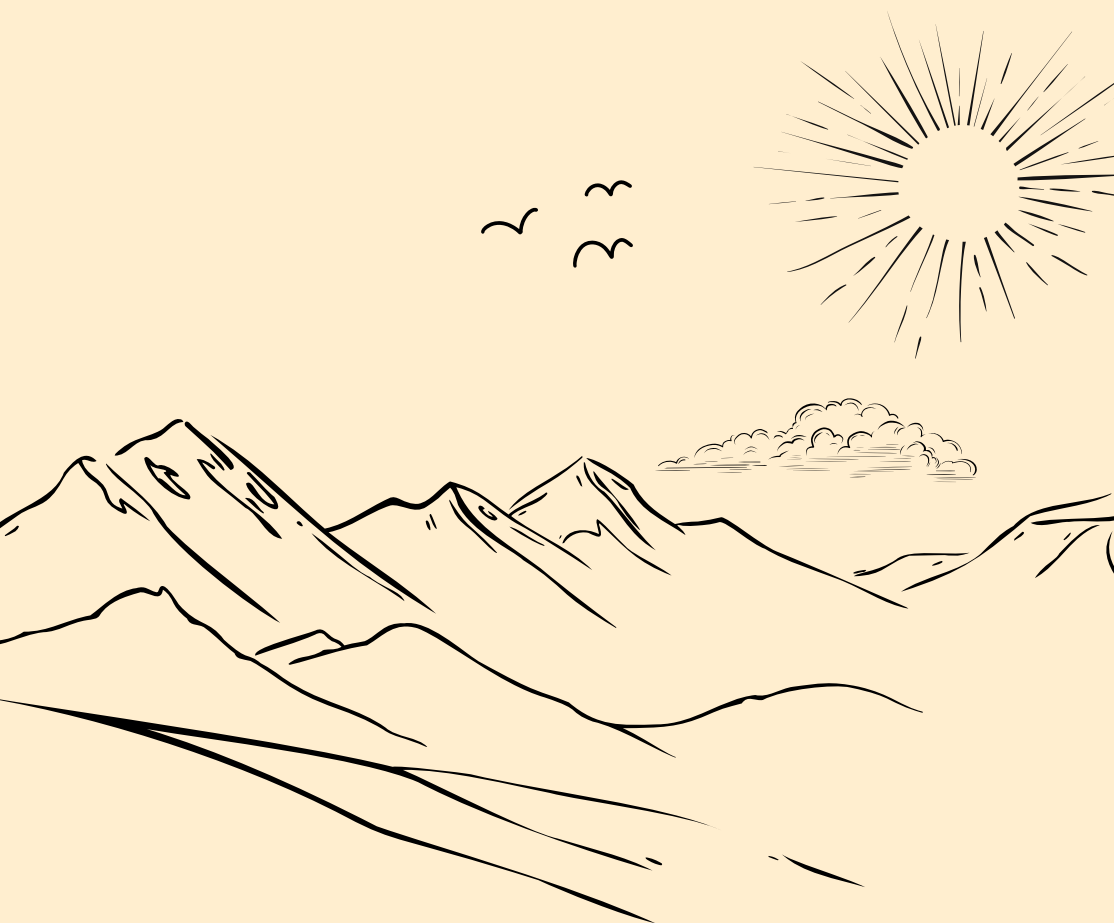
a persimmon, cut and peeled for me.

savoring the first sip of homemade soup, salty and oiled.

a kitchen swelling with fresh pork bone broth and softened carrots.

my world stretching to the front door, and not much farther.

I miss being brought in from the storms,
and being given quarter.



It Was Hers First.

What do I say
to the girl I see in my mother's glassy eyes
after the echoes of her screams?

How do I answer
the little girl draped in a woman's dress,
lost and wandering on her dirty feet,
asking "can I be enough for you?"
A question that will haunt us
between the stretches of our fights,
echoing in the corners of our rooms
by the silhouettes of us in our too big
clothing and our too big shoes.

If I am a well-used tin rattling with the loose change
of being three, twelve, eighteen, twenty-one
years old all at once

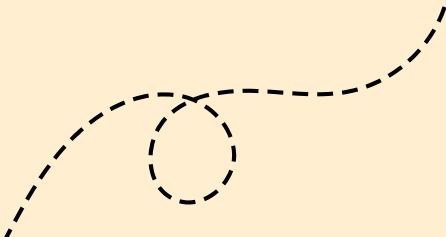
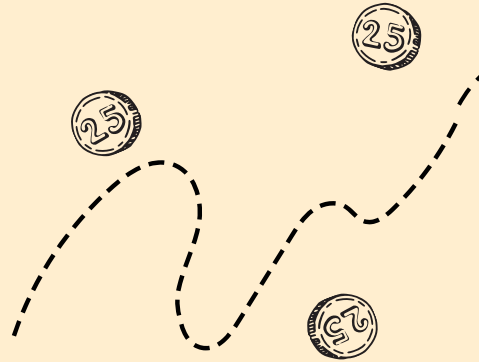
then she holds all of my ages as well as hers.

Clattering around, scoring her insides, nicking the thin metal.

She has held the weight of her womanhood in tandem with my girlhood.

I am pulling at her sleeve, begging crying for her
to meet me ahead, to build the bridge with me so I can ask
why my girlhood was rushed. Why is it me
pleading for her to find us again.

And I want to ask, just once, how terrified she is to live this life for the first time.



I Don't Belong in This Closet

An auntie once told me

You have a face like your mother's

and grew excited to see me in her wedding dress.

My tongue almost asked if she was going blind.

Streaked in expensive reds and blues, my mother
eats nothing but nectar and sunlight. Her cheeks hollow
with a missing gallbladder and Vogue's newest
triple zero jeans.

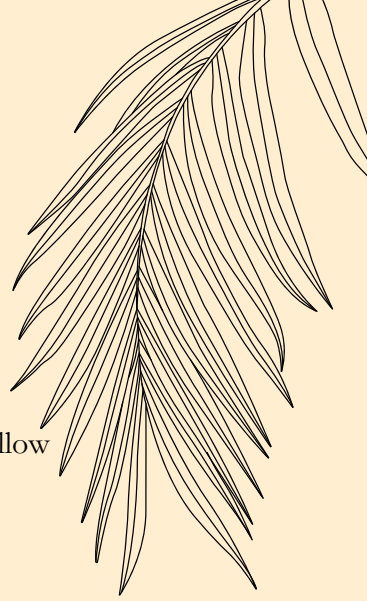
I am ripe in thrifted yellows and greens. This Hawaiian shirt
hangs loosely off the generous curve of my chest. My ribs
have rearranged my heart and lungs twice before noon. I fit
in size 14 jeans, and under the canopy of jungle leaves.

My lungs need the expanse of rainforest to breath,
to tickle its lining with the smell of heavy rain on leaves
bowed under the weight of water, and the taste of paranoia,
of crouching tigers hidden in the shadows.

My hair is the color of soil, nurturing and
soft, and my eyes are honey in sunlight and once
a man was so desperate to call me beautiful he
stopped me to press his translator app into my vision.

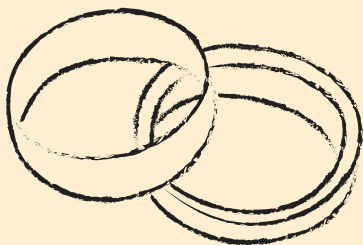
My kisses taste of mangoes. Bruising, saccharine.
Jungle, when you close your eyes.
Supermarket, when it's done.

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Mountains rest on my shoulders, and a torrent
of river carves the vertebrae of my spine. A
looping cacophony of primal calls ring in
my mind. I am as big as the wild,
and as wide as the seas. What could contain me?

When I was little and slimmer than a waif,
my mom promised her wedding dress to me. Now I fit
not in her dreams and barely in a ring she stole
when her mother wasn't looking.



God Eater

I remember the first time, my dear,
I gave the keys to the cathedral to you.
Showed off the stained glass windows, the
rows and rows of polished pews, the floors
so clean I could feel your eyes traveling up
my legs on them.

Up and up, poorly disguised as a gaze crawling
skyward until you realized the ceiling was decorated
with the art of our love, our lust, our bodies
crashing together like the stars when God
commanded the extinction of life, in order to make room
for Us.

I remember the bitter taste on my tongue
when you stood in the pulpit, grip tight on the balustrade,
gazing over the kingdom you have inherited. Our
Eden, because what was mine now became yours. Ours.
Swallow the acrid, forget the lovers that came before,
promise to wash their memories down with holy water later.

When I stand in the ruins of the cathedral, rubble sat
on filthy pews—our only worshippers left—
I can still see the ghost of you preaching in front, shouts
rattling the panes. Of giving more for the sake of the Lord,
of keeping the sinners outside these holy doors, my brethren
there is a silent war waging just beyond our borders,
here is where the lambs come for sanctuary, here is our Eden,
here.

Speak not of the man behind the curtain, counting tithe
in one hand, pawing every third bill away with the other.

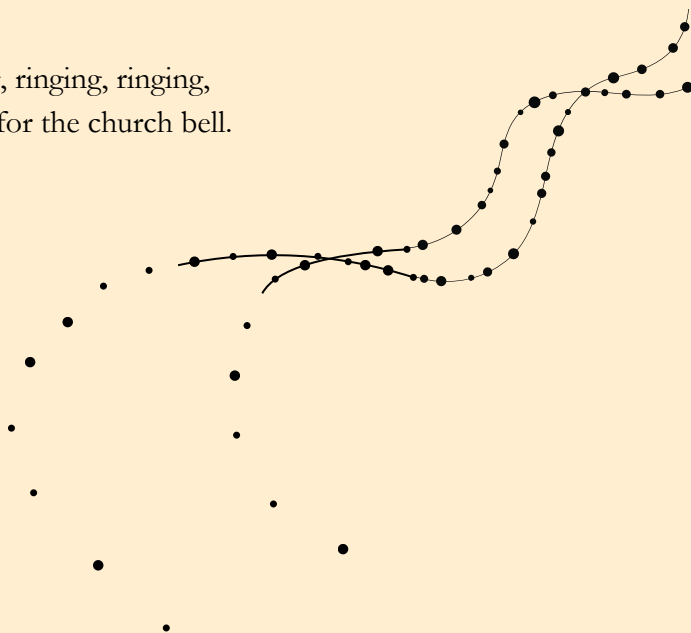
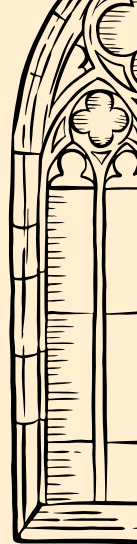


In the only way my mouth is fluent,
here is my apostasy, written with the remnants of my heart
stuck between my teeth. Love is not measured in the staying,
the penance, the kneeling until they were violet from prayer.
Until I was violent from prayer.

You abandoned our cathedral to claw for godhood, stepping on
the backs of our apostles. You've dug your heels into my hands,
breaking the flesh and marring the skin. Maybe one day I'll look back
and say I learned my lesson.

Tell me, darling dearest, when the bombs came down
and shattered the glass, rupturing the purples and yellows,
blues and hazels, what did it taste like? To see me standing,
center aisle, unhinging my jaw. To know I will be licking your bones
clean. Was it terrifying enough to see our constellations raining, and know
no Hail Mary's will be answered tonight? I have become
God Eater.

My ears have been ringing, ringing, ringing,
and I am holding the line for the church bell.



chasing taillights

there is no other sound louder
than the deafen of silence stretching
in each nook and cranny of my car,
in the dark of the night, when I lag behind
the car in front of me.

when the bright red bugs known as taillights
disappear behind a bend that blends with the
charcoal sky, I am aware that I am both alone
and not.

it's in the lull of bluetooth music,
and between the scattered flocks of highway lights
when the only passengers in the car
are me, and confident doubts poking at my nerves,
refusing to let them sleep. we have been listening
to the drone of tires against asphalt, sweat licking
the palms of my hands, making the steering wheel
slick.

I am revisiting every moment with you,

the touch of you

the laugh of you.

the smell of you

it has been seven god forsaken years and I (for the life of me)
keep coming back to you, and I, and some unimportant her,
looking at each other with these eyes made
of celestial intervention and cracking glass panes
because the voice who knows me best is pointing out
my worst with that air of finality telling me
eight years will vanish in the blink of an eye and I
will be haunted by the shape of your lips, the tone

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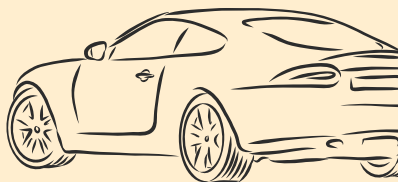
of your voice, and the way your fingers always fit
so naturally into mine.

and that is where you will burden me,
smoke still rising from where you branded
“not good enough” into the backwalls of my soul,
behind my eyelids, so I can read it every morning.

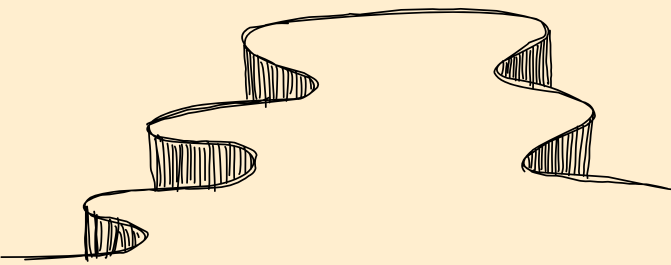
I am at the mercy of headlights, stretching as far
as I will let them, unsure if a jerking right motion
lands me in a tree or over a valley.

brake.

I am chasing your taillights all this time,
desperate for the familiarity of your
back, teeth chattering with the terror of
night inching in, of the passengers I carry
and their breaths of frigid air whispering
temptations of damnation, how easy it would be
for the screech of tires to be the last thing
I ever hear.



baby, if I hit this turn fast enough, will you be there?
baby, if I round this corner fast enough, will you be there?
baby, if I finally give it all, pay a price no one else is charged,
will I finally find your taillights?



the line between guilt and grace
is thinner than gossamer, tougher than sinew
and which side I land on
depends on what find me first:

the heart that
breaks for my mother

or the cardinal that sings for itself



the vows.

my life is written on my body.

it blossoms to greet the sun, unraveling
in a whispered symphony of fabric against skin.
another day? I ask and it replies, yes but you can have
five more minutes.

the shower is hot as it brings me in, steam
loosening the dirt and grime and worry from
last night. I am still hazy with a dream I cannot
remember. something about fresh oysters
at sea, and the vastness of space.

it lathers the loofah with the soap we love,
and the scent of white pears and crisp apples
stirs us. the world comes to focus, starting with
the smiling daisies on my shower curtain.

good morning, I murmur, as hands dry skin.

good morning, it whispers, tracing the bump
on our knee. a momento from the time we were
icarian from a cliff. the time we internalized
the sensation of

flying.

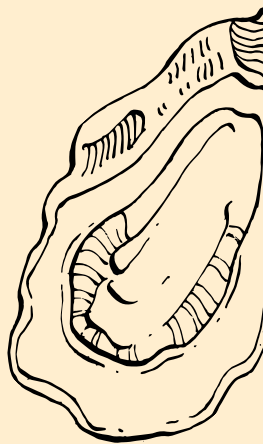
it traces over the spot of brown at the small
of our back, our very own coffee stain, marking
us well loved. and vintage. it traces over faded scars
I didn't think would go away.



are you ready for another day? it asks, standing
to put fingertips to toes. I relish the familiar burn
of stretch, placated enough to begin our blending.
to start losing track of where body meets mind, spirit
meets flesh, where touch becomes sensation.

we marry each other every morning, and sign our
divorce in toothpaste foam every night, punctuated
by the click of the bedside lamp.

how lucky I am to hold such love for myself
that my body can brave another morning,
holding our tender heart in its swaddle,
before my mind can start to worry.



death to the outsider

I carried the sky long enough the slope of my shoulders crease in my sleep,
turned feral by the wails of a ghost preaching in the ruins of a cathedral.
I was only tamed by the touch of his palms, worn with scars of blades
he did not ask for. he did not ask for the torrent running down my spine
nor the slice of a howl-filled night sunk into my eyes, but he asked if I
would like to see what a garden looks like. to see what nurturing looks like.

my fingertips are gentle with the petals of his flowers as I pass by.

I feel the grains against my hands and the flora surrounding me.

I buried enough axes and hatchets to know the worn handle of a shovel
and the taste of bitter resentment down my throat, to know how dirt tastes
gritted in your teeth and the stark loneliness of licking dried blood off your
lips nails hands arms

I'm learning how fragile solitude is, melting away at the first gesture of sun
and soil, the promise to love as gentle as bee wings and as kind as capybaras.

I sit on the edge of our garden, and may god forgive the wolves stalking
at the edge, mistaking his ~~softness~~ ~~compassion~~ ~~sweetness~~ love for weakness.
may they recognize the scent of buried blood and sound of low whistling
because I would hate for their lovers to find their bones spat on the ground
after I have sunk my teeth into them.



armageddon

there are days I think of his inevitable death,
and I seize at the mere idea of a life
without the chocolate of his eyes, the song
of his voice, the salvation in his mortal palms.

every time his lips kiss the insides of my wrist,
the brush of soft skin against a shielded river
of life, he brings me closer to a world where
no children cry, roses pass along couples freely,
and we are not afraid to say “I love you” in voices
louder than a whisper.

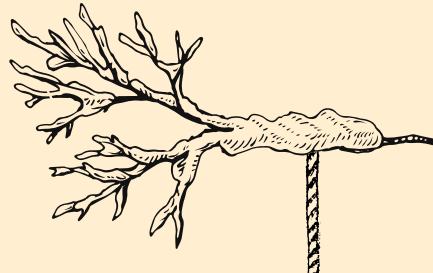


I want to watch my hair whiten in our mirror, still
drawing the same pair of hearts after hot showers.
his breath can tickle the nape of my neck, a spot where
he can sink his teeth into if he asked nicely. I want
to sit on the porch with you, for the rest of my life.

and when the day comes, where I am reminded of
our years apart, I will love you to the point of
damnation, for nothing is more hideous than the
amalgam I will be when your clock starts to stop.

for when you sigh your last breath against the back
of my hands, more familiar than sunlight
streaming through our linen curtains, I will know

nuclear winter.



in the pursuit of daylight



I offer a piece of mango sorbet candy to the man wearing Boglioli
as we wait for the light rail to come. Each time I blink, it is

an afternoon sun with a cheeky
breeze licking my stockings

or

a warm summer night, dry and
so kind I forget I am standing
next to a man I do not know, at
a station with no one else.

He takes the offering and, with thick fingers, unwraps it.

Pops it into his mouth.

Crunch.

Without hesitation, *crunch*.

You bit it, I say aloud and he turns to me with a strange swirl of
indignation, and piqued curiosity. He hasn't heard someone tell him
(subtly or not) that he has done something wrong

in a very

long

time.

.

"How do I get to the sherbet bit, if I don't bite it?" he asks, now facing
me.

I blink twice.

Sun. Night.

Sun.

Night.

You wait, patience. A shape I know intimately, from biting my tongue in gatherings, choosing softness over bluntness that would leave my friends bleeding out on their kitchen floors, dinner forgotten on the stove after

*he does not love you, and you sacrifice
respect and love to change him.*

*And I am tired of carrying your
emotional labor with me in the shape
of
patience.*

“Nah. Being patient doesn’t get you what you want.” And the moment becomes laden with the fat of lust and temptation. He’s leaning towards me now with eyes heavy in how he’ll ask me out next.

Sun. Night.

It got her what she needed. I curl my hair behind my ear. He catches it. Two rings hugging the finger to stop him in his tracks.

Sun. Night.

I daydream of the lilt of her satisfied giggle, the warmth of her thigh when I drive. Her calmness as I sobbed with a fear wracking my ribs like inmates at bars on the brink of riot. She is a patient man.

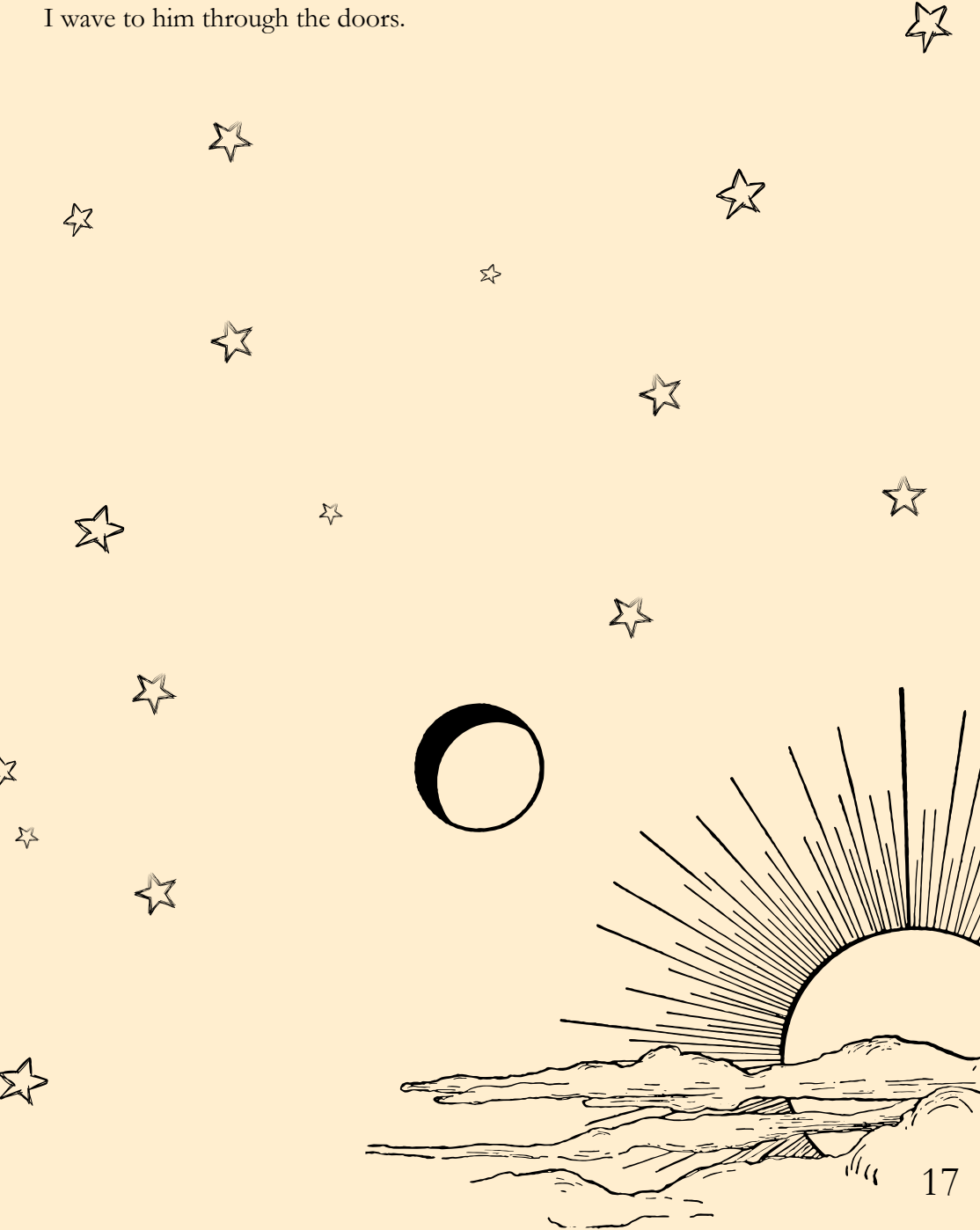
The man in his suit pulls away and throws the plastic wrapper on the ground in tantrum for his spoiled pursuit. The light rail pulls in. He steps on.

Sun. Night.

I do not.

Sun.

I wave to him through the doors.



✧ of a century

I was born smaller than a pea
held in hands ocean scarred and English broken,
frantically whispering the mantras their parents
told them:

✧ *excellence only accepted in the sacred ways
of knowledge and riches, otherwise the child
is wasted and we are failed cuckoos.* ✧

so I moved with the bruising grace
of a cuckoo child; pushing others out our nest
with the slap of hastily done math tables
(quick *and* accurate, my championship title)
and piano scales played with broken fingers.

✧ I screamed as I pushed my siblings out,
ignoring their cries and picturing their little bones
bearing the pressure of a cuckoo kin—they will never
grow back the same way.

✧ and when it was my turn to be pushed out,
I screamed “I am cuckoo too, I belong
here in our tattered nest
here in our violent shaking
here, right here.
please.”

✧ the sky is a swirl of blue and gray,
until your cuckoo skull cracks on the grass below,
and all you see are the sparkling black dots
of other cuckoo children, pitying but thankful.



the line between kind and nice all depends
on what they're holding behind their back
because my window was open when I cried;

a hot thermos of salted and oiled
soup



or



serving the noise complaint
papers, ink wet, smile tight. hey
girly.

I was scooped up in hands holding my
pretty cuckoo head upright, and washed
until the cuckoo colors faded from my feathers.
he kissed my pretty broken skull and said I smelled
of peanuts and was better than the lot of them.



I was born from the first notes of a love song.
I am the mad live scribblings of a composer desperate to find the end
to his concerto.



a study of history:



the lips of the woman who broke my heart first.



the silence in his car after screaming about our
families.



our playlist of songs frozen in time; she died of cancer.

singing in the car; shy at first but we're baring our
souls to each other, happy bachelorette party, she *is* my
best friend.



cont'd w/ break

my toothbrush in the caddy; shower water in my
mouth, thinking of each soul who laid their
handprints on my hips, arms, cheeks; inlaid their
fingers between mine, stained glass portrait of all
those who have loved/love/will love me.

the warmth of his amber soul as it fits snugly next
to my faux cuckoo heart,
humming along to the song in its beat, dancing with
me in a kitchen
hot from the oven and the love of covenant blood,
where the water tastes like wine.

when I am married to each of you
and kiss you good night, I taste
the peach trees and the wind. I taste
the freedom in the mountains.

I do, I do, *I do*.

Cuckoo.



quarter is a chapbook collection of poems composed by amateur poet Alexandar James, who thanks you immensely for reading their most vulnerable works to date.



Alexandar would like to take some time to thank a few of their supporters:

Blair, for dinners over shrimp tacos with Zoe and being one of Alexandar's loudest supporters & editors.



Tea & Vy, fellow creatives who got Alexandar off the couch and into writing again.

Forest, Alexandar's therapist who saw the tears and gritted teeth it took to write quarter.

All the members of IIQT & NNFAB, for the laughter that proved life continues after hurt.



and Michael. Love of my life, sun in my skies, wind in my sails. Subject on four of these poems alone. I am grateful to be walking the path with you.



quarter of a century

alexandar james has always been writing, from the silly imaginative stories we all write as children to the works published online in places we will not name to earning an English minor in writing in college. Poetry had never been a part of the plan, but in walked Casey Bell & Jared Stanley during university, who nurtured a little soul until they couldn't resist writing poems any longer. Some are cringe, some are actually quite good, and all are true to who Alexandar is.

quarter was a challenge Alexandar issued to himself, daring to write 12 poems in 12 months on life lessons they learned to celebrate their 25th year, create the visuals, and self-publish to the Internet. By July '24, Alexandar had all 12 written.

