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okay, here's the deal, i am writing this copyright page myself. (if you couldn't tell.) and, honestly, i have no idea what i am supposed to write. i am looking to the books on my bookshelf and blogs written on the internet for help. but still, i am clueless. so, hopefully, i am saying all the right things. like, don't copy my shit. but the nice thing about writing my own copyright is that i can say anything i want, like *what up, mom!* or i really want a slice of pizza. because i have no editor and i can do whatever i want.

anyway, you can find me here:

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cover photo was taken by *greg rakozy*. check him on instagram (@grakozy)

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this is the first edition of *for souls like mine*.

why are you even reading the copyright page? there is so much mediocre poetry and prose for you to read. go.

you made a mixtape?
good job.
i hope you get a good job.

- chance the rapper.

author's note

i am sick of waiting for the world to give me permission to live the life i want to live. that is why i am self-publishing this collection of writing. in this book, you will find poetry and prose written by me over the past two years. or, at least, the writing that didn't make me want to completely vomit with disgust and embarrassment. i have been told that i have a very *particular* type of writing. this book is really only intended for those with souls like mine. proceed with caution.

this book is best enjoyed on shuffle.

another author's note

flaws. i believe beauty only exists in things that are flawed. for the past two weeks, i have been meticulously editing this book. over and over and over again. discovering new flaws with each edit. and erasing them. sure, i can continue to erase these flaws until this book is one of pure perfection. but there is no beauty in that. so, i am stopping the editing process now. on may 1st, 2018, at 1:22 pm *for souls like mine* is officially considered finished.

i may not be perfect. but my scars sure are beautiful.

for souls like mine

i have been told that my writing is too depressing. that i should keep it light and funny and talk about how roses are red, instead—i'm sorry if my mind isn't in the place that you'd like it to be. i am filled with storms, not rainbows. i am 4 am in the middle of winter, not a sunny day with sand stuck to my leg and the sun piercing down, turning my skin into a darker shade.

i do not write to ease your life, i write to save mine. demons live within my skin, i'm sorry if you're uncomfortable with me letting them out to play every now and again. this is my book, my life, my poetry, and these are the only moves my pen knows how to do. this isn't a ballet, this is a shakespearean tragedy. no lives are spared here, no lies are told. this is just life and i'm okay with the dark side of my mind.

we are nothing more than dust experiencing life momentarily before we return to where we belong. we are just a speck amongst an infinite galaxy with infinite lives which will all someday be forgotten. and i am no longer afraid of that truth. i am here to enjoy the randomness that has been provided to me. i don't need god to give me a path, i will find my own with grass so green it'll bring tears to your eyes. i have no destiny, but that won't stop me from chasing the one inside of my mind.

can't you see? storms lead to rainbows and dark nights lead to sunrises. there is no beauty without chaos. there is no gain without sacrifice. there is blood in the veins beneath my

ryan david ginsberg

skin and occasionally that skin must be cut open and
blood must be spilled onto the earth below. but life will
spark once more from that tiny drop of blood in the soil.
i have been told that my writing is too depressing. but that's
fine, i write for souls like mine.

for souls like mine

our soul within

our skin may be bound to this earth,
but our soul within is infinite.
the stars are ours to explore,
once we finally shed this earthly skin.
so do not mourn when i take my final breath.
i am not this set of lungs
nor am i these heartbeats.
that grave will only hold the skin
that was once my imprisonment.
so do not mourn.
instead, look up always and know
that my soul is amongst the stars.
and that i am finally free.

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can you see me?

can you see me?

not the mask that i am wearing,

but the man who lives beneath it.

can you hear me?

not the words on my lips,

but the words stuck on the tip of my tongue.

can you love me?

not for the lies that i've become,

but for the truths i have hidden away.

for souls like mine

wandering mind

i wonder what she is thinking.
she sits across from me,
but her eyes are scanning the room
and her mind is wandering the universe.
i just want to follow her footprints—
explore all the places
her mind has just discovered.
she is across the table,
with the universe in her fingertips.

ryan david ginsberg

god's daughter

god's daughter locks herself in the restroom
with only one thing on her mind:
cover up the imperfections
that she never knew were imperfections
until the magazines told her they were imperfections.
she straightens away the curls,
covers the scars and the marks
as if her history has never happened at all.
her drawers and bags are overflowing
with boxes that declare *they* are the solution.
they claim to make her beautiful,
but they neglect the fact
that she *already* woke up beautiful.
god looks down and wonders
why we ever told his daughter
that her worth was dependent on paint
and cover-ups of who she truly is.
he cries out, "oh, daughter,
don't you understand that those marks
are my masterpiece?
those scars that you hide away
represent the blueprint to your soul.
i dipped you from head to toe into a sea of beauty,
those boxes only wash away the perfection
i worked so hard to create.
don't listen to the devil.
his scratchings can be found all around—

but i promise you this one thing:
all i create is beautiful,
all i build is perfect.
you, my beautiful creation.
you, my perfect masterpiece.”
but god’s words aren’t as loud
as the screams of the devil.
so, god’s daughter continues to paint over
what the devil has convinced her are mistakes.
all she wants is to be loved,
all she wants is to be worthy,
all she wants is to be beautiful.
so she does what the world tells her
will grant her those things.
god desperately cries out,
“you are already loved,
you are beyond worthy,
you are more than beautiful...
you are perfect.”
but she keeps brushing
and the devil keeps smiling.

ryan david ginsberg

everything is poetry

the thing about poetry is it was never really meant to rhyme. it was just words, written or spoken with elegance. often melodic, but not even that was a requirement. it just needed to be beautiful and significant. but people, we desire order. so we sentenced poetry to structure. we said rhyme at the end of each line, or you are not poetry. we said write about love or tragedy, or you are not poetry. we said we want tempo that is easy to follow, or you are not poetry. we said follow our rules, or you are not poetry.

but little do they know, oh simple minded fools, that everything is poetry.

for souls like mine

savage beings

we are nothing more than savage beings
dressed in fancy suits.

we erect buildings into the clouds
and cage ourselves in cubicle walls,
because we are far too wild at heart.

we need these prison cells
with fancy names like:

civilization

society

humanity.

because we are just savage beings
dressed in fancy suits.

society

i.

i want nothing more than to strip down society
until it's naked body sags in front of your eyes.
i want you to see its boils,
its scar-riddled skin,
the tattoos it got it in its youth.
the anger behind its smile,
the oppression behind its fancy vernacular.
all the shit hid beneath that goddamn suit and tie.
because society's skin is fucking hideous
and i need it to sag in front of your eyes.

ii.

society—
i call it a prison,
my mother calls it
“just the way things are.”
it grabs us in our youth
and whispers to us
things that it *demand*s to be true.
so it locks us in tiny cells called school,
and spoon feeds us all this flavorless propaganda
just to soften our wool
and tenderize our meat.

then at the end of it all,
it pats us on the back
and hands us a fucking piece of paper
that it calls a degree.
which we take from interview to interview
until we find a nice little cubicle
to call our home.
at the end of every two weeks,
we collect a paycheck with a smile on our face.
and then out come the shears:
students loans
taxes
mortgages
credit cards
insufficient fund fees.
society cuts and it cuts and it cuts
until we are nothing more than useless, wool-less skin.
then it demands we make more lambs
with more wool
so it can fill more schools
and fill more minds
with flavorless propaganda.

iii.

i try to fight back,
but i'm not so sure that i can.
you see,
my skin is also covered in wool.

and i can feel society's shears
against my neck.

iv.

produce wool
or die,
that's what society
whispers in my ear
with shears
still against my neck.

v.

society is supposed to be our shepherd,
our guidance.
but to me,
it seems
like society
may be leading us astray.
can you feel it, too?
society tells me that my worth
is tied up in a degree
that just put me in
\$42,000 worth of debt.
oh, mr. shepherd,
am i doing this, right?

or am i just softening my wool
and tenderizing my meat?
oh, mr. shepherd,
what do you plan on doing
with that fork and knife?
oh, mr. shepherd,
please stop licking your lips.

v.

oh, mr. shepherd, where are you taking the sheep?
i see them flipping through magazines.
and those screens,
those lives that they see,
they are so heavily filtered.
you warned them, right?
that the things they read aren't always the truth.
oh, mr. shepherd, why are you handing them more?
wipe that smile off your face,
you are poisoning the lamb!
it was your responsibility to lead them.
and look at them now,
can't they see that sign says *slaughterhouse*?
oh, mr. shepherd, did you forget to teach them how to read?
or did you simply forget to teach them
what that word really means?
oh, mr. shepherd, they trusted you with their lives,
look at what you have done.
there is blood in the soil!

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you were meant to:
lead them
guide them
teach them
save them.
yet all you did was teach them that slaughterhouse
means happiness and success.
that lives lived on screens
are lives worth living.
that articles in magazines
are imperative truths.
oh, mr. shepherd, are you proud
of the things you have done to our youth?
look at the lambs,
they are running around blind
as blood drips down their spines.
and all you did was lead the sheep
straight to the slaughterhouse.

vi.

there is a thick layer of blood
on the knuckles
of the shepherd
as he eats the lamb.
the lamb never saw it coming.
it just followed the path
laid out before it.
it trusted the shepherd.

for souls like mine

and now its blood
is on the shepherd's knuckles.

vii.

society sees us walking down the street.
it licks its lips
and rubs its stomach.
it disguises itself as our shepherd—
softens our wool
and tenderizes our meat—
then leads us straight to the slaughterhouse.
and we sheep never even see it coming.
but even if we do,
society just holds shears to our necks
and whispers,
produce wool
or die.

viii.

society's skin is fucking hideous
and i need it to sag in front of your eyes.

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pretty brown eyes

he tells her she should smile more.
"what do you have to be so pouty about
with your pretty brown eyes?"
here's a drink,
drink it down,
but there's no such thing as a free drink.
no, no, no.
there are expectations with your every sip.
"alcohol ain't the only thing i'm putting in you tonight,
pretty brown eyes,"
he says with a wink.
and for some reason,
despite her pretty brown eyes,
her smile seems harder to find.
i wonder why.
and so does the boy from the bar.
he pushes her up against the wall,
like they do in the movies,
and gives her a passionate kiss.
so romantic.
she feels the spilled beer on the back of her arms.
she waits for the kiss to finally end,
but his tongue sure is persistent
and he drags the kiss on for far too long.
so she pushes him away.
"what the fuck?
bitch!"

for souls like mine

he yells
as eyes around the bar
begin to swallow her whole.
she runs out crying,
reminding herself
that there's no such thing as a free drink,
even for her pretty brown eyes.

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8 to 5

8 to 5—

i watch as the hours tick away.

then go home—

and watch as my life does the same.

for souls like mine

more complex

i am much more complex than this skin over my muscles and bones. i am a cumulation of every star i have ever watched in awe. i am the mountains that i climb and the rivers that i swim across. i am my accomplishments and my tragedies and i am the years of sweat and blood that none of you will ever see. i am 2 am with a racing mind and three pm, still lying in bed, snuggled up with a movie, and hot coffee in my hand. i am head over heels in love, but my heart is still cracked from the last girl who held me as i cried myself to sleep. a little bit of me lives in every footprint i leave behind on this little earth i temporarily call home. this skin is not me. it is just a vessel i use to climb and swim and cry and love. but i am far too complex to be defined by my skin.

ryan david ginsberg

alone in a garden

what is it that you dream about?
is it me or someone else,
or are you alone in a garden
full of roses?
if so, please let me be the water
that your roots seek for nourishment.
i lie here in bed,
looking out at the stars,
and all i can think about
are your dreams and roses
and if i can be the water
to your roots.
you?
you can be my entire garden.

toxic

we love each other,
there is no denying that fact,
but to say we should be together
is a lie that shouldn't touch either of our tongues.
we are toxic—
two beautiful elements apart,
but when together
we are destructive.
for that reason,
we must end this here.
i will always love you,
but if our atoms were to tangle
the world could crumble
and i will not allow you to be responsible for that.
you deserve a happier ending than that—
i wish i could be your happy ending like that,
but i can't.
we are far too toxic for something like that.

ryan david ginsberg

why'd the chicken cross the road?

metaphors are great.
you can confess anything you like
and most people won't even understand.
like there is an actual reason
why the chicken crossed the road,
you know?
(don't worry, it's not a joke.)
you see, things weren't really going great at home.
or rather they were,
but in his head, they weren't.
yes, his wife loved him,
but there was something in her voice.
he couldn't quite put his claw on it,
but he knew there was something.
and work, he was certain he was about to get canned.
i mean, sure, his boss always said he was their best employee
and his coworkers completely adored him,
but their clucks always seemed to quiet
whenever he entered a room.
and his friends—
yes, he had lots of them,
but last week
a few of them went to a movie
and didn't invite him.
so when he approached the dusty road,
that night,
a thought crept into his mind.

for souls like mine

he closed his eyes
and stepped into the road.
but that night
the road wasn't as busy
as he'd hoped.
and he made it all the way across.

so tell me,
why'd the chicken cross the road?

ryan david ginsberg

oh, robert frost

two roads diverged in a yellow wood.
oh, robert frost, how i wish life was truly that easy.
i stand here, at a multi-leveled intersection,
looking out at too many roads to count.
and i *swear to god!*
every time i fucking blink
i see another road added amongst the mess.
two roads,
how i'd give this fucking kidney
for just two roads to choose between.
you see, this is how it is in the yellow wood i find myself in.
with infinite paths and zero guarantees.
oh, robert frost, you sacrificed one life?
whopty fucking do!
in my yellow wood, they make you sacrifice limbs.
they make you sacrifice kids
and careers
and goals
and sandy beaches.
i see millions of mes traveling millions of paths.
one has a lovely wife.
one has two beautiful kids.
one has that career i have always desired.
but i can't make out which is which.
or which one i even want.
you see, the mes are quite hazy
and i am quite dizzy

for souls like mine

and i can feel them cutting off my fucking limbs as i speak.

choose!

now!

they yell at me through gritted teeth.

oh, robert frost, how easy you really had it.

i choose a path

and watch all the mes

and all my dreams disappear,

along with my limbs.

but robert frost,

you chose between *two* roads diverged.

good for fucking you.

ryan david ginsberg

alone

i have never really been alone—
only surrounded by people
who convinced me that i was.

for souls like mine

the beauty of poetry

the beauty of poetry is:
the words reveal the soul of the poet,
while the interpretation reveals the soul of the reader.

i keep slipping

i keep slipping. in my mind and on the page and on the pavement beneath my feet. there are no 10 steps to a perfect life. the steps are countless. infinite. and it is so difficult to take each one with perfect precision. or good. or even half-decent. maybe my shoes are too big or my knees are too weak, but, either way, walking has become increasingly more difficult nowadays.

i keep slipping. allow me to elaborate with a couple more metaphors that won't really make sense. i am not making this easy to understand, i know, but god didn't make life easy to traverse, so why's all the pressure on me to make things easy for you? i want you to love me and know me through my poetry, but does that only make me a metaphor of a man that no one can understand?

i keep slipping. but the funny thing is, i am not even running. or walking. i am merely crawling through mondays in search of friday nights. is that all that i've become? i remember running through the lawn on summer afternoons. i remember ice cream parties in my pajamas. i remember a day when i didn't wear a watch around my wrist and i didn't have a phone in my pocket to remind me that i am always late and missing out on everything life has to offer me.

i keep slipping. on my words and on my plans and on my

for souls like mine

promises. i reach out my hand, but there is no one around. so i push down on the ground and rise up without a sound. it is dark, yet the light is so blinding. i am choking on my senses. i am drowning in expectations handed down to me by only myself.

i keep slipping. she is lying in bed and staring at me, wondering what thoughts are racing through my mind. but the only words i can find are words that are searching for better words. she needs me at this moment, but i feel the bed expanding and her and i growing further and further apart. there is a wall in the middle of the bed disguised as a pillow. she rolls over. maybe then she can finally get some answers.

i keep slipping. and i swear to *god* these cubicle walls keep shrinking! mr. bossman, i ask you again, when will this paperwork ever end? he just smiles and hands me another folder. i lose myself more and more ever-so-slightly with each form i fill out and each day my time card tells me when i can and when i cannot eat my peanut butter sandwich.

i keep slipping. in and out of sleep. i see a man in the mirror, but i swear that man isn't me. he may look like me, but there are scars on his soul that i refuse to claim. goddammit, i seem again to be out of whiskey. maybe this time i will take a beer. or a pill. or anything to help me fall asleep once again.

ryan david ginsberg

i keep slipping. there is darkness. i hear a million whispers that when combined can be deafening. i try listening to one voice at a time, but each voice keeps getting lost to another and none of their words are distinguishable though i can hear the anguish and disappointment in their tones. then the whispers turn to shouting and the shouting turns to me alone in a dark room. where silence becomes the most deafening thing i have ever heard.

i keep slipping. while everyone around me moves forward with ease. briefcases and backpacks. diamond rings and diaper bags. wallets that form a bulge in their back pocket. cars that go *vroom!* and watches that glimmer in the sunlight. me? i am once more lying on the floor, attempting to stand back up.

i keep slipping. i crawl up to the door of god and attempt to knock, but there is no sound. i bang my fists as hard as i can against the wooden door. i stand and kick and fall with a loud *thud!* but the door remains silent. i try to listen for the shuffling of feet, for the unlocking of chains, for the voice of god. but there is nothing but silence.

i keep slipping. and you keep flipping through the pages hoping that this will all eventually make sense. but it won't. this poem will just end with disappointment. all these words are just metaphors for a life that you will never understand. and i am just a metaphor of a man.

i keep slipping.

for souls like mine

repress

we are all just children
trapped in the body of an adult
being told to repress
who we truly are.

ryan david ginsberg

imagination

as a child, our imagination runs free.
it travels to every corner of the earth and beyond.
it sees unicorns while the world sees horses.
it sees flowers in a dead garden.
it can find the light no matter how dark the night.
the world is yours—
if you let your eyes be led by your imagination;
if your feet follow the path
that is only accessible inside your own mind.
there are ladders and bridges and arms that become wings.
everything!
but society cannot allow that.
no, no, no.
society demands your eyes.
it demands your wings be clipped
into arms with simple fingers.
it tears down ladders and demolishes bridges.
it beats your imagination over the head
until the path inside your mind is no longer visible.
and all you can see is society—
marching aimlessly.
where horses are only horses.
and dead gardens are only dead gardens.
we never lose our imagination,
it is stolen from us.
we are born with wings,
they are just clipped.

for souls like mine

mr. america

i used to imagine america as a she,
soft and gentle.
but america is most certainly a he,
strangling me with his callused hands.

i wonder

i look up at the flag; the red, the white, the blue all flowing effortlessly in the wind; my hand is over my heart; the teacher tells me i have to stand; pledge my allegiance to the flag; repeat the words exactly as she says them; i wonder if the flag is also pledging back.

i bow my head in church; i interlock my fingers in my lap; place my knees on the pew; everyone in the room does exactly as i do; or rather i do exactly like them; pray; i wonder if whoever it is that i am praying to can hear my prayers over all these voices.

i sit in class; i am in the front row, center seat; i sit patiently; i am eager to learn; on my desk is a textbook published by a billion-dollar corporation; my teacher repeats the lessons handed down to him by someone who had the lessons handed down to him; he keeps mentioning a test at the end of the year; all of my teachers keep mentioning some test; something about budgets; i wonder if that is all i am to them, an opportunity for a greater budget.

i stand alone in the voting booth; there are many names for me to choose between, but the media tells me only two really matter; republican and democrat; one hates one, the other hates the other; i stand with a pen in my hand; i am trying to convince myself that the government still serves its people, not just billionaires and lobbyists; but i don't believe my own lies; and i certainly don't believe theirs; i wonder which lobbyist it is that i am really voting for.

i watch the people walking by; strangers, to me and to

themselves; each and every one of them are looking down at glowing screens; they are searching for meaning in worlds that don't truly exist; the air is silent, but for the chirping of birds and the clicking of fingertips on screens; i wonder if they notice me watching them.

i study my reflection in the mirror; i stare at his shaggy hair and his sleepless eyes; the sadness hid beneath a smile; the ink tattooed to his fingertips from poems only he will ever read; i wonder what he thinks as he stares back at me.

i wonder when the flag's freedom will finally ring; i wonder when god's salvation will finally arrive; i wonder if education was ever really about educating; i wonder if the corruption will ever stop; i wonder when community became so lonely; i wonder if this is real or if this is just in my head.

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cubical thoughts

fuck society and its cubical thoughts
i think it's finally time
we start colorin' outside of the lines
they want nothin' more than for you to believe
that there are only a few things that you can possibly be
you see, they control our education
and tell us how to think
every morning they make us stand
and pledge to a flag
that never truly pledged back
so sit down
these politicians don't serve us!
we fled the british for this?
i'm about to throw all of washington overboard
fuck your tea and fuck you
this ship is sinkin'
but y'all just keep on singin'
every day only one thing is becoming clearer
this nation is for the rich
they want to kill off the poor
and hide them all behind bars
or lock them up in their cubicles
it's just the american scheme
dressed up as the american dream
prison cells painted as white picket fences
tell me success only exists in the city
then charge me limbs for the rent
you take my livelihood from my fingertips
then tie me down to my desk

for souls like mine

my stomach is growlin'
i'll do anything for a burger
just a couple more hours
of doin' work for the man
maybe then
i can finally fill up my fridge
how dare you trick these young kids!
you the real devil
i hope you choke on your oil
give life back to the people!
give us the freedom you pretend we be havin'
so go 'head
try to lock us away
but we risin'
and we comin'

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if only peace

if only peace
was profitable.
i wonder then
how quickly
we would attain it.

for souls like mine

the america i seek

america has no race,
no religion,
no political party.
america is all-encompassing—
it is both yin and yang,
both you and me,
both the tired and weak.
it is a place for all to call home,
a place with stars and stripes and opportunities for all.
whether you wear a uniform or a suit,
whether you pray to one god, two gods, or no gods,
whether you speak english, spanish, or swahili,
america belongs to those who seek it.
our arms are wide open.
all loving, all wanting.
america as all-changing, all-evolving.
it is still ours for the forming.
you see, america can be all of these things,
if only we allow it to be.

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human

my parents taught me to love
and never judge a book by its cover
or a man by his turban
i was taught that gay or straight
never hate a man
for who he was born to be
i was taught that just because one dog bites your neck
doesn't mean all dogs are evil
i was taught to lend a helping hand
when i saw somebody in need
i wasn't taught about religion or nationalities
but rather i was taught about humanity
and how no matter the size
or color of skin
we all have a heart that beats in the same way
and desires in the same way
and a soul that longs for love in the same way
i was taught not to hate
but rather to understand
i was taught to speak with love
and keep hate far from my tongue
i wasn't taught how to be american or christian
i was taught to be human
and i was taught it doesn't mater where you were born
or who you bow your head down to at night
we are all one and the same
human

a million stories

there are a million stories
hidden in the depths of your eyes.
i can see the pages,
but i cannot quite make out the words.
tell me the things your eyes have seen.
the things your fingers have grazed.
caressed.
held.
what is it that your heart has felt?
loved?
desired?
and those eyes,
with the stories written in its multi-colored irises,
how many tears have they shed?
you have so many stories to share.
and i am all ears.

ryan david ginsberg

the freckles on your arm

maybe i am crazy, but i swear the freckles on your arms are constellations. i lie in bed and study your skin like i lie in the grass and study the night sky. then i watch as you open your eyes like the sunrise on a summer morning. welcoming in another day. and what a beautiful day it is.

seasons

summer.

at two years old,
i frolicked through the yard
in nothing more than a barney diaper
and the largest smile across my face.
the sprinklers on,
i ran through the water
and felt my face being soaked
by the beauty
and ease
of life.
every day felt like summer to me.

autumn.

but then the seasons began to change.
the leaves turned a golden yellow
and slowly fell from the trees.
leaving them bare.
as was i.
in the yard.
i ran into the house,
smile gone,
face still soaked—
this time from tears,

ryan david ginsberg

not sprinkler water.

i was:

bare

naked

exposed.

i grabbed a t-shirt

and a pair of pants

and threw them over my

no longer two-year-old body.

winter.

then the yellow leaves were covered up

by inches upon inches of snow.

it is so easy to fall in love

in the dead of winter.

but little did i realize

it wasn't only her body

that was bundled up,

but it was also her soul

and her secrets

of another man

that wasn't me.

i dropped to my knees,

ignoring the frostbite

crawling all over my skin,

and begged her to stay.

but all she said was,

“seasons change.”

spring.

i am no longer two years old.

i am covered by so much more than a barney diaper
and sprinkler water.

i am covered by scars
and regrets
and neglect.

i am covered by a million shattered hearts.
the sprinklers are still on in the front yard,
but i only watch them
from inside my home.

alone.

with just my scars
and regrets
and neglect.

waiting for the season to change
once more.

ryan david ginsberg

limp

i may not be able to save you.
but if you don't mind,
i'd sure love to limp by your side.

for souls like mine

if she knew it

i wonder if she knew it, that i loved her then. it was 2 am as we laid in bed. day old popcorn in our laps and another chick-flick playing on the television. we hadn't spoken in hours, but her hand was still in mine and that was all i needed. i kissed her popcorn buttered lips and slipped my free hand onto her hip. did she know it then? could she feel it? because to me the love was almost overwhelming. i felt it flowing through my veins and pouring into my lungs. i felt it in my shoulders and in my tongue as it danced along with hers. i felt it in my sweat-covered palms and in my chest as she slowly pulled my shirt over my head. i wonder if she knew it, that i loved her then.

marathon

one morning, i woke up
and decided i wanted to run a marathon.
not that day, obviously, i am not completely insane.
(only partly.)
i just wanted to run one,
eventually.
but first, i needed to train.
so that morning i ran a mile and a half,
resulting in me nearly collapsing
as i tried to climb the stairs
back up to my apartment.
i could hardly walk the next day,
but i still ran.
i ran every day.
*(okay, i admit, i took a couple days off every now and again.
what? i am only human.)*
every week or two i upped my mileage.
after two years,
i found myself at the starting line of a marathon.
the gun went off
(it was really a whistle)
and the marathon began.
after the first mile, i found myself in the middle of the pack.
after the fourth mile, i found myself towards the back.
after the ninth mile, i found myself in front of only a few.
after the fifteenth mile, i found myself in dead last.
where i remained

for souls like mine

for the rest of the race.
the winner of the marathon finished with a time of 2:11:31.
i finished a couple hours after that.
well, more like a few hours after,
but that's not the point.
the point is:
one morning, i woke up
and decided i wanted to run a marathon.
and then i did.

**i didn't actually run a marathon. it's just a metaphor. for life.
my mom wanted me to clear that up.**

ryan david ginsberg

he tripped

he tripped over his feet
every time she came around.
not because he was clumsy,
but because he loved holding her hand
as she helped him to stand.

for souls like mine

why are you so worried, darling?

why are you so worried, darling?
can't you see
all these stars in the sky?
i think
someone
put them there
just for you.

ryan david ginsberg

happiness and despair

we are taught that we should always be happy. that love is without struggle. that the grass should always be green. i disagree. life is full of seasons. seasons of happiness and seasons of despair. seasons of love and seasons of anger. seasons when the grass is green and seasons when the grass is a golden brown. we are taught that life is one-dimensional. i disagree.

for souls like mine

money

why do you keep
talking to me about money?
do you really think i'm impressed
by your dollar bills?
i'm not.
i want stories about humanity.
i want love,
i want sleepless nights beneath the stars.
keep your money,
i am here to live.

the sea

there is freedom in the wind.
there is life in the waves.
i close my eyes
and let the sea take control of the ship, momentarily.
my worries seem to fade away.
her name seems to fade with the wind.
her face,
her voice,
her scent,
all seem to fade into the nothingness.
all i can see
and hear
and breathe
is the ocean breeze.
my heart,
for the first time in weeks,
beats with no intention other than its original design.
there aren't any long pauses in between beats,
the beats aren't anxious in any way,
they are just natural.
in a way that has become so terribly foreign to me.
i look out yonder,
into the blackness of the sea and the glittering of the night sky,
and wonder why i ever decided to live
anywhere other than here.
everything i ever loved
back on land

left me
with just a short letter of justification.
she said she needed room to breathe,
so i fled to the only place i knew
where there was no shortage of room—
the sea.
but i don't see her anywhere.
it is just me
and the sea
and the breeze.
but this sea is all i need.
maybe these are just drunken thoughts,
but the sea is where i belong.
i tell myself this over and over and over again.
the sea is where i belong.
the sea is where i belong.
the sea is where i belong!
though where i long to be
is inside of her arms.
but her arms are gone.
i whisper one more time,
the sea is where I belong...
and this time
i almost believe it.

ryan david ginsberg

red lipstick

she wore red lipstick
and tight dresses.
she danced alone
on empty dance floors.
and she finally fell in love
with herself.

for souls like mine

addict

love is just a chemical
and i'm a fucking addict.

ryan david ginsberg

degree on my wall

there were once
dreams in my veins,
postponed
by the pursuit of a degree.
the debt left after four years
has me limping through cubicles
with paperwork
piling up beyond the stars.
and my veins are sucked dry
each month
as i sign my name
and dreams away
on the bottom of yet another check.
picket fences get lost in another apartment complex.
vacations are sacrificed to the expense of a new suit.
i wonder if my boss even remembers my name?
i haven't been home to visit my mother
in nearly two years.
my father says she is sick,
but i am working overtime again this weekend.
interest on my loan is rising
and interest in my dreams are fading
somewhere within the skyline
of a city drowning in smog.
i cannot wait until tonight
when i can finally lie in bed
and close my eyes

for souls like mine

and dream about a life
that never was.
but that's,
of course,
if i am able to sleep at all.
there's a degree on my wall
that needs to be paid off.

ryan david ginsberg

empty fields & skylines

there is a field in front of me.
on the left
there is a path.
the path is:
safe
known
explored.
 the field evolves into a forest.
 dark
 and uninhabitable.
the only thing that grows in its soil
 is debt
 and ramen noodles.
the path leads to skylines,
cubicles,
and 401(k)s.
but the path is crowded,
and the certain
don't look
so certain to me.
i see fear in their eyes,
regret in their steps.
they long for tall grass against kneecaps.
they desire breeze
and room to run free.
but you see,
 there are no skylines in empty fields.

for souls like mine

there are no salaries
or PTOs.
so, on the path is where they remain.
as for me,
i look out at the field.
i see no footprints,
the dandelions are untouched,
but i've never really been a fan of cubicles.
so i take a step forward,
and run towards the forest.

our youth

we call our youth:
foolish
immature
naive.
we are quick to:
ignore
neglect
dismiss.
you are our future,
but you are not our now.
so sit
and quiet down.
your thoughts are still free—
not yet trimmed.
there is still propaganda
you have not yet seen.
your imagination still roams
and there are far too many colors in your dreams.
let us lock you up first,
reshape that circular mind.
until then:
sit
and quiet down.
you are our future,
but you are not our now.
not with those free minds of yours.
no, no, no.

for souls like mine

forget about dust

i don't need you to fuck my skin,
i just want you to caress my mind
there is no need to wrestle my tongue
just converse with it
i want so much more than
to just intertwine our skin
don't you know
we are just souls
surrounded by dust
temporarily given shape
as skin and bones?
so let's make the most of what is truly us
and forget about dust

ryan david ginsberg

storms on the horizon

there are storms on the horizon.
i feel the breeze against my cheeks,
tiny drops of rain upon my head.
the clouds begin to rumble
and grayness consumes the sky.
storms linger on the horizon.
and i am standing in the middle of the road
with just the smallest umbrella in hand.
waiting.

for souls like mine

resonate

i wonder if my words will ever resonate
with minds that aren't mine.
my veins may be filled with stories,
but every seat in this auditorium is empty.
i hold the microphone tightly in my hands
and whisper words
nobody seems to hear.
i am alone in this mind
and in this skin
and in this *goddamn* auditorium.
and these words will never resonate
with minds that aren't mine.

ryan david ginsberg

smoke in my lungs

i still feel the smoke in my lungs,
the vibrations in the wall
as she left with a slamming door,
the cold asphalt beneath my feet
as i tried chasing down her car,
the blood dripping down my knuckles
as i punched mirrors
that dared reveal my drunken reflection.
i still see the empty drawers.
i still see the goddamn dent
on her side of the bed
and in the middle of my chest
from her fragile little head.
and i still feel the smoke in my lungs.
the cigarette between my fingers.
we didn't smoke often—
only in celebration.
but celebrations
quickly turned into drunken arguments,
and arguments
quickly turned into wars
that needed to be escaped.
so she packed her bags
as i inhaled the smoke deep into my lungs.
my feet couldn't run nearly as fast
as her red sports car.
i no longer only smoke in celebration,

for souls like mine

as i no longer have anything worth celebrating.
i take another puff
and look down at the scars on my knuckles.
from broken jaws
that dared reveal my drunken reflection.
wars ensued.
celebrations lost.
regret painted with blood
dripping down her chin.
she escaped the war
in a red sports car.
leaving me with nothing
but scars on my knuckles,
empty drawers,
vibrations in the wall,
and smoke in my lungs.

no more

i feel you in my veins. my heart murmurs your name. my soul cries out when you're not around, and right now you are not around. i wish i could reach out and feel your touch once more. i wish i could pull you in and hold you tight. i desire the graze of your lips upon mine, but it's fine, i know destiny did not assign you my name.

my knees are black and blue, my voice is raspy from praying out to the lord that he, or whomever it may be, would rewrite our prophecies so that you and i were meant to be. i do not have faith in myself to survive in this world without you. you are my lungs. you are my dreams and without you peaceful sleep can never exist.

i miss your scent, your lips, your hips, i miss all of you. i miss your mind and the places our conversations would go. i have traveled further and deeper in an hour with you, than twenty-four years on my own. i feel like my life is no longer only my own, but rather it is partially yours. after all, my soul is partially you and my mind is consumed by you and my heart knows only of you and my tongue shouts only your name. it's a shame that you and i are miles apart. it's a shame that my heart has to learn once more how to beat without you. i feel defeated without you. i have forgotten how to breathe without you. i am unconvinced that the world even exists without you.

i see the trees. i feel the breeze. i hear the shouts of innocence, but none of it seems real. the only thing that is real in this place is you and me, but *you and me* are no more.

for souls like mine

lies

she told me it was all lies,
i told her, "i know,
i just hate being alone."

ryan david ginsberg

clumsy with love

i have held love in my hands
and dropped it too many times
to believe i will ever get a chance
to hold it again.

for souls like mine

eternal light

she kisses me with an eternal light and floods the darkness out of my mind. she is my sanity. my umbrella on a stormy night. my parachute as i soar through the clouds of expectations. she is the blood flowing through my veins. she is the heart that beats inside my chest. she is the air within my lungs. and she does it all so effortlessly.

ryan david ginsberg

lost boy

he was just a boy—
lost in a world
that he couldn't understand.
she was just a girl—
who finally made the mess in his head
make perfect sense.

for souls like mine

what other choice?

she asks me,
“how can you love still,
when all you’ve ever known
is a broken heart?”
i kiss her forehead and whisper,
“what other choice do i have?”

syllables

there is so much pressure in every syllable.
what if i never find
the right words to describe
what's really going on in my mind?
this ink, this pen, this page in my notebook, my soul—
what if none of them are ever enough?
is it fine that i don't rhyme?
is it offensive for me to even call myself a poet?
i've accepted that i'll never be like
langston hughes,
shakespeare,
or maya angelou,
but is that fine with you—the reader?
is that fine with me—the writer,
the human,
the seeker of love?
do i write for notoriety
or do i write because i know that my soul
would never allow me to do anything other than write?
is this truly my calling?
or am i forcing something that should have never been?
god, are you listening!
or is it only me—
this ink, this pen, this page in my notebook,
with words that don't rhyme,
and syllables!
there are far too many syllables.

for souls like mine

have i written this before?

sometimes i feel like my words
and thoughts
and breaths
are so repetitive.
like i am not an individual
living life,
but rather a moment in time
stuck on repeat.
like i am standing in the same place
i have always been,
just saying the same words
and thinking the same thoughts
and breathing the same air
over and over and over again.
as if i've written this poem before.

ryan david ginsberg

good poet

i don't think i'm a very good poet.
truthfully.
my words don't really rhyme
and my vocabulary is quite limited.
sure, i can write in metaphors,
but i can't really make those metaphors make sense.
i talk far too much about me and writing
and not enough about roses.
or maybe i talk about roses too much?
i don't know.
all i know is i don't think i'm a very good poet.

but that's okay,
because neither are you.

fuck the gatekeeper

fuck the gatekeeper.
i'm jumping the fence
and ransacking this whole village
while their lazy ass sleeps.
don't they know?
this village is mine!
i'm their favorite poet,
they just don't yet know my name.
i'm their favorite poet,
they just need a little convincing.
i'm their favorite poet,
this gate is just jammed.
so i'mma jump the fence
and ransack this whole fucking village
while the gatekeeper sleeps.

ryan david ginsberg

in the third grade

in the third grade,
i was sent home
with a note that said,
your son refuses to play by the rules!
my mother pinned it on the refrigerator door
and gave me extra dessert.

for souls like mine

i want

i want snow-covered mountaintops where the sun is always
lingering on the horizon
i want stars at the moment they are just beginning to twinkle
i want rain in the middle of an empty field with my arms
stretched wide and my eyes shut tight
i want that brand new book with pages that still smell of fresh
ink
i want adam and eve in a garden free of sin
i want the moment right before the curtain begins to rise
i want the moment when the lights begin to dim
i want the spotlight just slightly too bright as i walk on stage
with nervousness all over my skin
i want the moment right before the audience stands and erupts
i want the breeze right after the storm
i want the thirty-minute debate in my head over whether i
should grab your hand or not
i want the moment when our fingers first touch
i want the look in her eye when she removes her shirt
i want the feeling of our hips colliding and her lips upon mine
i want the ecstasy of when our bodies are intertwined
and i want it to last forever.

ryan david ginsberg

love me, darling

love me, darling.
not for the words i write
in the dead of night,
but for the soul
that breathes within me.

let us be

it doesn't matter
our race,
religion,
or sexual orientation—
we are all one and the same.
beneath all our skin,
we are just human beings
seeking love
and happiness
in a world filled with hate.
does it really matter to you
what i do
beneath my own sheets?
does it alter your life
when i decide
to pray to a god
in my mind
that you don't recognize?
you see,
we are all just human beings.
so, please,
let us be.

ryan david ginsberg

black friday

on sale—30% off,
it says in bright red letters.
i'll take three!
yells me, a single mother.
don't worry, none of them are for me,
all three are for my three kids.
“ma'am, your card was declined,”
well, that can't be right,
i declare.
it's 30% off!
that's what i read on that sign.
you see it?
the one in red letters,
it says 30% off—swipe it again!
“it was declined-”
can't you see?
my kids are eager for these things!
“ma'am, you just don't have enough.”
so this christmas my kids just must go without?
what if i only get one?
swipe it again—30% off—what if i only get one?
“ma'am, your card was declined.”

for souls like mine

rose amongst the weeds

what do you say
to a rose who grows amongst the weeds?
how do you convince it of its undeniable beauty,
when all it knows to be true
is that it is the freak within the garden?
tell me,
what do you say?

ryan david ginsberg

complexity

there is complexity in the bones of humanity.
there is love behind the anger
and fear within the bravery.
there is a baby giggling in its crib
while the neighborhood it lies in
burns to a crisp.
there are wars in hopes of peace,
and mother's working three jobs
whose only desire is to be asleep in her twin-sized bed
with her two children by her side.
life is short,
but at times it feels like it is dragging on and on with no real
end in sight, but we continue to fight through the pain in
our veins and the taste of death on our tongues.
we turn our head away from the homeless man
while on our way to church,
but still, we drop five dollars in the donation box
as it comes around.
there are paradoxes in our dna.
there is irony in our skin.
we are human,
and our bones are complex.

for souls like mine

cumulative experience

being human is a cumulative experience.
it demands love
as much as it demands heartbreak.
it requires fear
as much as it requires joy.
humanity is light and it is dark
and blessed are those
who experience it all.

ryan david ginsberg

crashed

she crashed,
because she couldn't take her eyes
off the rearview mirror.

for souls like mine

nights don't have to be so lonely

nights don't have to be so lonely, you know?
i know you like to be embraced by the stars,
but i have arms that can keep you much warmer
than the night sky ever could.

ryan david ginsberg

why did you kiss me?

why did you kiss me?
that night
beneath the streetlight
with hot coffee in our hands.
you kissed me
and i felt the world at my fingertips.
upon my lips.
and against my skin.
you kissed me
then pulled me into your house.
we set our coffees on the counter
and removed our shirts
in your candlelit bedroom.
but the next morning,
you called it a mistake.
as if you never meant
to set the world
upon my lips.
you handed me my then cold coffee.
as i put my shirt back on,
i asked you,
why did you kiss me?
but you didn't respond.
you simply closed the door behind me.
and you took the world with you.

for souls like mine

words

i want to write words that reverberate through your soul.

i want to write words that consume you

until they are the only words you know.

i want to write words that can bring peace to the world.

but, *fuck!*

i left my dictionary at home.

ryan david ginsberg

anxiety

will these feelings
ever let me free?
these anxieties,
i can feel them
squeezing on my chest.
let me free!
for one night,
i just need to get some rest.
i promise
i'll let you back in tomorrow.
my chest
and thoughts
and life
will be yours
once more.
just please,
please,
let me get some sleep.

to kid cudi

kid cudi,
was me who you were speaking to?
as the late night turned to early morning,
as i lied awake in bed
unable to turn the demons off
inside my head,
as i contemplated
things i don't even want to write down
for your eyes to see,
was it me?
i swear those songs must have been written for me
because i could almost hear you
singing out my name through the melody.
the demons may not have left my head,
but at least your words comforted me
until they finally fell asleep.
so, thank you.
thank you for speaking to me through the night.
thank you for helping me fight.
thank you for erasing contemplations.
thank you for easing the pain.
and thank you for writing all those songs for me.
i hope you don't mind
that i wrote this little poem for you.

self-love

i.

“do you love me?”
she whispered as she faded to sleep.
“oh, please tell me that you love me.”
but there was no response.
she was alone
in an empty bed
on the edge of an empty apartment,
whispering to herself
as she fell asleep.

ii.

my girlfriend,
when she first read this,
said it was sad.
but fuck that.
yes, she was alone,
but let's not confused being alone
with loneliness.
and yes, she was asking if she was loved,
but she wasn't seeking love from a man
nor woman
nor parent
nor some fucking peer from work.

for souls like mine

no, no, no.

she was seeking love from herself—
self-love.

and maybe she doesn't love herself yet,
but she is actively seeking it.

and seeking is more than most people ever do.

so this poem isn't about some girl with no love in her life,
it is a poem about a girl
who is brave enough to seek that love
within herself.

ryan david ginsberg

my name remains the same

nothing seems to be constant about me,
except for my name which remains the same.
my body is constantly reshaping:
skinny
fat
muscular
vastly mediocre.
my skin is just a canvas
that i constantly paint upon
with tattoos
that my parents hate.
there is a smile on my lips
and anger in my eyebrows.
i am lethargic.
no, i am energetic.
i eat jars of peanut butter at 3 am
and chicken salads at 2 pm.
i am grumpy
and lovely
and funny
and easily annoyed.
i am lonely
and this love is overwhelming
and i hope you never leave me
and i need to be alone.
i am hot
and cold

for souls like mine

and far too lukewarm.
i am in a college dormitory.
no, i am living in my car.
no, i am back in my parent's guest bedroom.
i am suicidal
and exuberant about life
and now i am bored
and i hear demons whispering in my ear
and life is such a beautiful thing.
i am walking on cobblestone streets
and safari roads
and dominican beaches
and i haven't left my bed in two weeks.
i am shouting:
angry
happy
hopeful
heartbroken.
i am writing a screenplay.
no, a memoir.
no, a novel.
no, a collection for souls like mine!
i am a shapeshifter,
but my name remains the same.

ryan david ginsberg

stars

you see stars
to wish upon.
i see stars
to explore.

the stars and the moon

i want to yell at the moon
and scream at the stars,
how dare they abandon me here!
with the soil
and trees
and all these bodies of water for me to drown in.
there may be skin over my star-dust filled veins,
but i swear i am just like them—
the stars and the moon.
i am meant to soar boundlessly,
expand infinitely.
no star nor moon is meant to guide me,
i am meant to be a guide myself.
it is not me who is destined
to sit on a mountaintop
and gaze at the night sky in wonder.
no, no, no.
i belong there,
in the cosmos,
amongst the moon and the stars.
this earth is not where i belong.

ryan david ginsberg

roses and tulips

while everybody stares at the roses,
i can't help but notice
a single tulip blooming alone.
i wonder how it got there.
i wonder how the roots look
beneath the soil.
is it given the room it needs to grow
or is it being strangled?
how is it that i'm the only one to notice
such a beautiful tulip
amongst the roses?

for souls like mine

limitations

i have dreams
painted in colors that do not exist.
there are words on the tip of my tongue
that have not yet been assigned definitions.
i hear songs in the breeze
made from instruments not yet constructed. my arms can fit
 through the bars of this cell
i've been locked in since birth,
but i cannot squeeze my chest through them.
there are limitations in this skin
i find myself in.

ryan david ginsberg

bucket list

i hate checking things off my bucket list,
all it is is one less thing to live for.

expectations

i am choking
on these
expectations
that are all over me.
i need some space
i cannot breathe
with all these eyes
that keep surrounding me.
give me a pen
tell me to dance
between these lines
they keep on handing me.
i'm just a man
i'm not a god
get off your knees
stop bowing down to me.
i feel their hands
they're closing in
this is the end
of all of you and me.

ryan david ginsberg

voices inside my mind

i am a slave
to the voices
inside my mind.
but it's fine.
as long as they keep writing,
my mind
is theirs for the taking.

for souls like mine

life

the moment i realized
my poetry didn't have to rhyme,
was the very moment
i finally understood
life.

i'm no hero

i.

the world is heavy
on my shoulders.
i feel my feet slipping
and the earth tilting
and the people screaming.
don't they know?
i'm no hero.

ii.

i fucking hate myself
sometimes
for just sitting here—
writing—
while people are out there:
dying
starving
too tired to go on.
i just sit here
pretending
that my words will
one day
save the world.
i fucking hate myself

for souls like mine

sometimes,
but not even my hate
can save them.
so i forget about my hate
and just write, instead.
i'm no hero,
just a fucking coward
with a pen,
writing the same damn poem
over and over and over
again.

ryan david ginsberg

when will it all end?

all these wars fought over gods that do not exist
all these sleepless nights with you on my mind
all this air stuck in my lungs
when will it all end?

for souls like mine

amongst the monotony

there was beauty
in the way
she found love
and joy
amongst the monotony.

ryan david ginsberg

life of a writer

being a writer
is like volunteering to go insane
every single day.
but oh,
how sweet the pain.

for souls like mine

autumn

the leaves fall,
as does my skin.
the trees
and me
evolving
into newer beings.

ryan david ginsberg

swim

i used to swim
in the darkest corners of my mind.
i nearly drowned
in self-sorrows
and contemplations
that no man
should ever have.
but now i swim
in your smiles,
i soak in your laughs.
and found happiness
and life
once more
in your arms.

an apology to those who came before

oh, langston hughes,
i know i'll never
be like you.
and ms. emily dickinson,
please forgive me
for the sins
i have committed
under the name of
poetry.
sylvia plath,
i saw your footprints
in the dirt
and tried to chase them,
but i realize now
all along
i was on the wrong path.
allen ginsberg,
father?
no, you couldn't be,
but whoever you are—
cousin? no—
i hope you can forgive me, too.
i am a fool,
i know,
but my pen
refuses to
stop.

ryan david ginsberg

i left my heart in botswana

i left my heart in botswana.
in the streets of gaborone,
in the village of old naledi,
in the empty fields with dirty soccer balls,
beneath the star covered sky,
atop kgale hill.
i left my heart in botswana.
with the greatest people i have ever known:
gracious,
taffy,
tebo,
thapelo,
and so many more.
i left my heart in botswana
and i can't wait to visit it again,
but i know i left it
in the most trustworthy of hands.

for souls like mine

empty bottles of tequila

empty bottles of tequila lie on his bedroom floor,
her perfume is still in the stitches of the linen
and the memories of her are still in his veins.
he tries to drown her out,
but she loves tequila, too.

ryan david ginsberg

rent is due

**you have reached the voicemail of _____
please leave a message after the beep**

hi, it's me.
i know it's been a while since we last spoke,
it's just...
i have a lot of things on my mind.
you see, rent is due in a couple of days,
but i just needed to take a moment to say,
i'm still thinking of you.
each night.
each day.
each shift.
while my brow is covered in sweat,
my mind is covered in you.
i just wish i had a little more time.
maybe in a different life...
i should go.
rent is due in a couple of days.

for souls like mine

stars and scars

i see stars on the horizon
and scars on my arms
from memories
not yet forgotten.

ryan david ginsberg

the flag you choose to wave

you are not the whispers behind your back,
nor your reflection in the mirror,
nor the voices inside your head.
you are your actions
when no one's watching.
you are your hopes
and your desires.
you are your choices,
not your circumstances.
you are your lessons learned,
not your mistakes made.
you are not your scars
but rather you are the way you choose to embrace them.
there is a war within all our veins:
evilness versus good,
you are the flag you choose to wave.
you will not win every battle,
but you will fight, nonetheless.
and it's that fight that will define you.

hope

i see hope in the distance.
it is tucked snug over the horizon.
i stand here
and watch it in silence.
hope sticks out its head
and takes a peek,
then ducks back out of view.
i take a few steps forward,
slowly,
then i break into a sprint
until i too stand over the horizon.
when hope sees me,
it embraces me tightly,
as if to ensure that i never let it go.
"finally," hope says to me,
"i've been waiting for anybody to see me.
there is so much i need to show you."

ryan david ginsberg

i've been around the world once or twice

my eyes have seen a lot of beautiful things
like chicago snowfall in the middle of spring
i've seen the new york skyline light up the sky
and the milky way light up the african night
i've ran with bulls down a spaniard road
and seen molotov cocktails
fly through the athenian air
and explode
i've climbed atop the eiffel tower
been mesmerized by the cliffs of moher
for hours and hours
i've floated down the french riviera
and stood where paul stood
as he paved the way
for the christian era
i've been around the world
once
or twice
but nothing compares to the feeling i get
when i look in your eyes
nothing compares to the touch
of your hand upon mine
and if my memory was to decline
i pray to the lord above
if i can keep one memory
that it would be you
everything else can fade away

for souls like mine

the blueprint

life is too short to spend it overthinking
in fact, i'm kind of over thinking
i'd rather be smoking and drinking
with a couple of buddies
halfway across the world
with a couple of girls
whose names i can't remember for the life of me
but they'll provide us with a couple of stories
get some ink to remind me
of the places i've been
i'm fine with letting it wrinkle up with my skin
you see, i'll never regret a decision
because they are the blueprints for the man that i am
the ones who love me will understand
i let the hate float away with the wind
and pray the love never ends

ryan david ginsberg

spilled ink

i want to feel love
i want to get rid of this hate in my head
i want these demons off of my fucking bed
i want your images of me to change
but first, i need to introduce you
to who i really am
i am the king of self-deprecation
i hate my actions
i love what i can do with words
i can stir emotions in you that you never knew
sometimes i feel emotionless
sometimes i wish i felt emotions less
sometimes i feel like i'm on top of the world
only to wake up
the next day
with the world on top of me
i love to love
wait, no, i'm afraid of love
i want to be validated
but hate being complimented
my opinions change every day
i wear a cross around my neck
can't remember the last time i even prayed
i can get lost in your eyes
and hate you at the same time
i want to spend forever with you
but never see you again

for souls like mine

the only thing i commit to
is the fact that i will never commit
i'll strap a bomb around my waist
let it blow up in an empty room
and rid the world of this evilness
you're just another piece of my puzzle
run away
i'm the devil
but i've got the heart on an angel
i want your images of me to change
i want these demons off of my fucking bed
i want to get rid of this hate in my head
i want to feel love.

misunderstood

please get me away
from this man in the fucking mirror
i want to make one thing clear
i'm not who he says i am
he drinks venom
and spits poison into the world
i need to place him on the edge of a cliff
kick him off
and never look back again
i'll walk away with a smile
only stop so i can hear the
splat!
nobody would miss him
nobody really knows him at all
he is just the shell of a man
walks around with big eyes and no vision
speaks big words with no action
he exercises his tongue
but never goes for a run
he spills ink on a page
the whole day
and never shuts the fuck up!
yet says nothing at all
his heart beats, but it beats for nothing
he speaks, but he speaks to no one
he reaches his hand out for help,
but nobody's near

for souls like mine

he just breaths in his own air
he feels like he's speaking in tongues
nobody understands
he's shouting!
the silence rings through the air
he's grasping!
the world slips through his fingertips
the voices are taunting
the fingers are pointed in his direction
the air has turned into laughter
he can't breathe
his face is turning red
then somebody turns to him and says
one day they will understand.

ryan david ginsberg

world full of masks

i fall in love too easily.
never show me any vulnerability—
i love souls too much to be exposed to something like that.
please don't show me who you really are,
unless you plan on loving me back.
we live in a world full of masks,
please don't remove yours
unless you want me to fall in love.
you see, your beauty radiates through the side
of the mask you display to the world.
i can already see the potential of who you can be,
but i swear if i see the whole thing
i will fall madly and irreversibly in love.
please fake it like the rest of the puppets walking around,
or else i won't be able to stop myself.
we all live in fear that if our deepest thoughts
were leaked into the world
we could never be loved.
but i promise you this one thing:
every soul deserves love.
even though the world says to hide it—
don't.
but i warn you,
if you take off that mask
and become who you truly are
i will not be able to prevent myself
from falling in love.

for souls like mine

mask

all i ask is that
you see past this mask
and discover the man
society told me
no longer to be.

ryan david ginsberg

always

i think about you,
always,
because i never know
which thought
shall be my last.
and i'll be damned
if that last thought
doesn't contain you.

my world vs. yours

these problems are only in my head,
i know that.
my anxiety.
my depression.
my insecurities.
they are not tangible things,
they only exist within me.
but then again, so do i.
i only exist within my own mind.
we all walk around in the same shared space.
on this earth.
in this galaxy.
but reality is only what we perceive it to be.
there is a world inside my mind
and there is a world inside yours.
my reality
only exists inside my own mind.
which is also where my world resides.
so these problems,
they're real.
they control my mind
and therefore dictate my reality.
my reality,
not yours.

black lines

my first-grade teacher handed each of us a piece of paper. on that paper were black lines. black lines that told us where our colored pens were and weren't permitted. my teacher said, "this assignment will be graded based on how well you stay between the black lines. besides that, be as creative as you like." some made bold decisions, like coloring the woman's hair green or coloring the sky a dark red. but i chose to ignore the black lines altogether. atop the black lines i chose to draw something new. something all my own. and i received an f. with a note in red that said, "i told you that you could be creative, but only within the black lines."

goddamn these city lights

sometimes i want to pack my car,
throw everything i own in the trunk,
and escape these city lights.
i want to drive until the asphalt turns to dust.
drive until my car runs out of gas
or until i run out of dust to drive upon.
i want to climb to the highest point i can—
to where the stars meet the earth.
i want to inhale the mountain air
and feel the dirt between my toes.
i was never meant to fit and squeeze
within the four walls of this cubicle—
you have imprisoned me!
let me free!
i was made to spread my arms,
my wings,
and fly.
but all i see are city lights
and skyscrapers that block mountains
and block stars
and block my wings.
why won't you just let me fly?
goddamn these city lights.

ryan david ginsberg

fallen angel

is it sinful of me
not to tell god
that one of his angels have fallen
into my arms?

for souls like mine

from a young age

from a young age,
the world told me who to be.
it told me how to think
and it told me how to speak.
but luckily for me,
i was far too distracted
to hear the demands of the world.
while everyone else
fell in line,
i was too busy
staring up at the stars.

ryan david ginsberg

peaceful sleep

just 10 feet away, i watch as she sleeps. she is rolled up in a ball with a blanket snuggled tightly around her skin. she hardly makes a sound. her breath so soft. her chest rises slowly and sinks even slower. i wonder what she's dreaming of. what she sees when her eyes are closed and her mind runs free. what places does her imagination travel to? maybe she is on a mountaintop looking up at the stars. or sitting atop a roof watching the sunset in the distance. all i hope is that she finds peace. for peace is what i find as i watch her sleep.

for souls like mine

you are not my sun

you are not my sun!
you are just my moon—
you only watch me as i rest.
you don't know the work i put in
when the sun is high in the sky
and sweat is heavy on my brow.
no, no, no.
you are just my moon.
and you need to be surrounded by stars
for your sky to shine.
me?
all i need is a pen.

ryan david ginsberg

millennial boy

i wonder when i began to prefer digital screens
to starry nights?
when did i give up on love
just to settle for likes?
i collect followers
and neglect friends.
i am just a millennial boy,
wondering when all this will end?

for souls like mine

love

the answer to all of
our worries is,
and always has been,
love.

ryan david ginsberg

proud

i just want to make you proud,
though i'm not even sure who "you" even is.
the world,
god,
mom?
i don't know.
i just want to make somebody proud,
anyone at all.

for souls like mine

fear

i fear death,
but not nearly as much
as i fear
your eyes
upon my words
and your mind
as it attempts
to understand them.

ryan david ginsberg

first, they laugh

first, they laugh
then they call you foolish
then they call you mad
then they begin to hear whispers
then those whispers turn to shouts
then they call you genius
and pretend they believed in you all along.

for souls like mine

beautiful gift

the sun will rise tomorrow,
but there is no guarantee
that i will rise with it.
but today i did,
what a beautiful gift.

ryan david ginsberg

long summer nights

i miss those long summer nights. driving down some random country road with the windows down and music blaring so loud that I could hardly hear my own thoughts. i often made those drives alone. i still do. but it felt more liberating then. now it's just fucking lonely. and my thoughts are much louder than this busted stereo can ever go.

for souls like mine

know me best

it's funny how the ones
who really know me best
are the same ones
who never fucking call me back.

ryan david ginsberg

not really a poem (more of an observation)

i have written more poems about roses than the number of
roses i have actually stopped long enough to smell their
aroma.

i have written more poems about sunrises than the number of
sunrises i have actually woken earlier enough to sit and
admire.

and i have written more poems about stars than the number of
stars i have actually lied in grass long enough to watch
twinkle in awe.

for souls like mine

hidden in the metaphors

he wrote his thoughts into poetry
hid himself in the metaphors
because only then
did people listen.

ryan david ginsberg

momma, i swear

momma, i swear,
one day
i'm gonna change the world!
i just need you to be patient with me.
that's all i need,
just a little bit of patience, please.
i am flipping through this dictionary as quick as i can,
you see, i just need to find the right word!
it's in here,
somewhere,
i just haven't quite found it yet.
but soon i will.
and then, momma,
i swear
i'm gonna change the world.

sing for me

how will it look? the day i am dressed in my final suit. when the blood has been excavated from my veins and my heart beats no more. will people crowd within the church and speak praise on my name? or will the air reek with silence? will i have done everything i could have done or will i have just been another wasted chunk of skin? will they mourn? will they read this poem over the open casket that holds the skin that once held me? and will they sing?

oh, how i hope they will sing. how i hope they will remember me for the poems i wrote and fret not the poetry that will be buried within the skin of my fingertips. that thing in the casket you see, that is not me. it is only a shell of what i once was. i will not be dead in that casket. i will be alive inside the hearts of every person in attendance that day. i will be alive in the words they use to share their memories of me. i will live forever in this poem. so, go on. sing. and remember me for the poems i wrote and fret not the poetry that will be buried within the skin of my fingertips.

ryan david ginsberg

my greatest love

honestly, i'm just hoping i haven't fucked this whole thing up.

have i misread the stars?

poetry—

was it ever really meant to be?

there's a marketing degree somewhere in this messy room,

maybe i should just use that, instead.

find me a nice little cubicle to call my home.

set the pen down,

put this damn notebook away,

and wake up from this foolish dream...

i just really hope i haven't fucked this whole thing up,

because i'm not so sure i could live with that mistake.

poetry—

you are my greatest love.

if i have made a dire mistake,

i beg you to forgive me.

prose

pokémon thief

i am a fraud. but i have crafted my mask so well that you can no longer see its seams; in fact, there are moments when even i look in the mirror and believe my own lies. but that's all they are—lies.

i grew up in a rural town with a population just under 10,000. there were no separations further than two degrees, so if you messed up the word quickly migrated into every ear in town.

for instance, when i was seven years i was inside a convenience store with my mother. she was shopping for that night's dinner, but i had wandered off to a more enjoyable section of the store—the section with trading cards. at the time, i was a pokémon junkie, so i searched through the decks until i found one that gave me that tingling sensation. i could feel the rare, holographic card calling my name from just behind the wrapper. i ran to my mother, deck held tightly in my hand, and asked her if she would purchase it for me. she, focused on her shopping list, shrugged me off with a quick *no*. but i was not about to let that card get away from me, so i slid the pack into the waistline of my pocketless athletic shorts.

after another twenty minutes, my mother and i were finally leaving with a few bags of groceries. i could feel the pack of cards against my waist, the tingling sensation returned to me, but this tingling was different. this tingling was the pack slowly slipping from my waistline. i swallowed hard and tried to secure the pack against my shorts, but my hands were full of groceries.

as the pack slid fully down my leg, we walked passed the owner of the convenience store. he waved hello to my mother. as my mother called back to him she was joined by the sound of the pack colliding with the gravel below. i quickly bent down and slid the pack into one of the bags, but i could feel their eyes piercing into me. by the end of the day, the entire town knew of my misdeed.

they called me *pokémon thief* until the day i finally moved away. i was ecstatic about the idea of recreating a new identity. not a single soul in this 638,000-person town knew a thing about me. i was free to be a new man. free to be something more than just the *pokémon thief*.

i was 14 years old when we made the move. a freshman in high school with a whole new world in front of me. i spent the first couple days just observing the kids. i discovered the cool kids, the jocks, the academics, the drama geeks, and every other clique imaginable.

at my last school, i was a drama geek. i participated in every play our school put on and often went to neighboring towns to participate in theirs. i loved theatre. i loved the feeling of being on stage and knowing, even though i had stage directions and lines and a very specific plan, that anything could happen. but i also knew cool kids didn't mingle with drama geeks. and i also knew cheerleaders would never return the lustful looks thrust upon them by said drama geeks. i had been at the bottom of the food chain for so much of my life. i wanted to try something new. that is when i began to craft my mask.

i sat a table or two away from the cool kids and studied their behavior. i listened to their conversations and dug their

notes out of the trashcan after class and memorized them as if they were written by shakespeare.

by time the school began to take notice of the new kid, my mask was ready for experimentation. the fantastic thing about this time in history is that social media was alive and well, so the presentation of my mask was easy. i filled my twitter feed with joy and wit that was nonexistent in my real life. i filled my instagram with photographs of vacations i loathed and of people i despised, but the locations were gorgeous and the people were proof i was worthy of other's time.

after a couple weeks, though i hadn't really made many friends on campus, i began to establish quite a following online. all the while, i continued to study their social cues. i studied their diction like it was a foreign language. i studied their fashion like an artist studies picasso and a musician studies ms. lauryn hill. i changed the way i talked and the way i walked and the way i thought, i changed the rhythm of my heart and i chipped away at my brain until i was indistinguishable from them.

after a month, i walked to my typical table for lunch and heard my name called out. i looked around for the source and noticed that it was coming from julia, a major player in the group of popularity. it seemed like my mask was working.

the nerves i felt as i sat by julia's side quickly resided as i discovered there was nothing truly special or unique about this group of people. they were just like me, kids who desired to be loved. we spent that lunch in small conversation. i told them about my old town and told them lies about how i ran the school. they foolishly believed my every word. people want to believe in the greatness of others, or rather they want to believe

that great people would want to spend their time with them.

then, after we had completely exhausted ourselves with human interaction, we returned to staring at our phones. we sent out tweets about how great of a day we were having, though our day consisted of merely staring at screens, so how great could it have really been?

as freshman year turned to sophomore year, i found myself dating the most sought-after senior on campus. she was a shoo-in for prom queen. it was unheard of that a woman of her stature would be dating a man as young as i, but my mask was praised more often than god around this shallow campus.

every time i wandered the schoolyard, i felt the lustful and jealous eyes from girls and guys alike. there were whispers and shouts around campus conversing my greatness. my name was inked into notebooks by drifting minds. i was a legend, which by its very definition is a lie.

for the longest time, the mask felt light on my face. the lies fell off the tip of my tongue and rolled off my fingertips. i was in bed with my deceit and dragged anyone who was willing to come with. i sat high on the throne and wore my crown of lies with pride. but kingdoms, no matter how large or how strong, always come crashing down.

it wasn't until prom night that i first felt the weight of my mask. prom night is what people like me live for. i had the most beautiful girl on campus under my arm and every eye and spotlight was to be focused on us. but it didn't feel quite right. i met up with my date early in the evening and the two of us exchanged corsages and boutonnieres. we smiled until our cheeks burned and our parents were finally satisfied with the photographs that would later gather dust in a photo album

hidden beneath a pile of boxes in the attic. as we walked to my car she whispered seductively into my ear about what tonight had in store for the both of us—and that is when the mask first tugged.

when we arrived at our friend's house we were greeted with a party bus and multiple bottles of liquor. my date instantly poured shots for the both of us. the bus was filled with loud music, disco lights, and aggressive dancing. i begin to feel disoriented, my girlfriend's breath was warm on my neck, and my buddies looked at her and me with vulgar eyes. this was not where i belonged.

i felt this overwhelming weight on my shoulders. i felt the mask tugging on the tiny hairs upon my chin, trying to rip itself free. the soul within, which had been tied down and locked away, shoved its way to the surface. the past two years finally hit me. i used to be a kid who went on stage because i loved the feeling that anything could happen. i lived for unpredictability. i smiled, not in photographs, but in real life. the mask dug deeper into my skin.

for the first time i began to feel like a total fraud. i was not the man they thought i was. everything they knew about me was a lie. i was no longer myself, i was a persona; i was a fraud.

my girlfriend began kissing deeper into my neck, her fingers fondled my hair, and her body pressed harder against my own. it was as if the oxygen had been sucked from my lungs, my vision was slowly fading into blackness, the music quickly dissolving into static so loud that my screams couldn't even pierce it. i felt myself, my real self, disappearing. i reached for the brim of my mask and attempted to rip it free, but i couldn't—the mask had taken root so deep that it and i were

ryan david ginsberg

no longer two, but one.

“i am the pokémon thief!” i yelled at the top of my lungs. “i am the pokémon thief!” the music was too loud. “i am the pokémon thief!” my girlfriend moved her lips up to my own and sealed my mask forever with a gentle kiss and slip of tongue. my shouts turned to whispers and eventually faded out with the wind.

i *was* the pokémon thief.

but i am no more.

wondering eyes

she looks at me with wondering eyes. or wandering eyes. i guess both equally apply.

she wonders. she wonders of my intentions. my intentions with my words and with my actions. are they truly me? or are they simply projections of i think she wants me to do or say or believe? i hold her hand gently in mine. but wasn't it she who reached across the bed to hold my hand? when was the last time i reached across to hold hers?

she wonders.

but also she wanders. she wanders to lives lived but never finished. and to lives never lived at all. she wanders to her past. to past lovers and past dreams. before she felt tied down. with me. here. in this bed. with our fingers only slightly squeezing one another's. and she wanders to lives un-lived. to lives with people like that man from the bar. what was it—two, maybe three years ago? the man who said she had a gorgeous smile. and eyes. and oh, that incredible laugh. it felt good. being complimented. she hadn't been in years. and, now that she thinks about it, she isn't sure she has been complimented since. but she wasn't quite ready to throw away 7 years for a man she had just met. and what about her kids? so she politely said *thank you* and walked away. leaving lives behind that would remain un-lived.

her eyes wander.

also, they wonder.

and from across the bed, with our fingers only slightly squeezing one another's, my eyes do the same.

momma

"momma," i cry out.

my head feels like it is on fire. i am sweating, yet freezing, and i cannot decide whether i should keep this blanket over me or take it off.

"momma," i cry out, again.

but the door doesn't open. there aren't any footsteps in the hall. there is only the sound of the fan spinning overhead, the sweat dripping down my forehead, my bones shivering, and the shakiness of my breath. not to mention the racing of my heart.

"momma."

why can't she hear me? doesn't she know that i need her? she is all i have ever needed and never have i needed her more than i do right now. i feel the air being sucked from my lungs. there is a heaviness in my chest. and this blanket! do i leave it over me or not?

"momma!"

finally, she hears me. and i hear her. she is running. down the hall. then she slams into my door. she grabs the doorknob, but it refuses to turn. and the door refuses to budge. she shakes it some more.

"momma!"

i hear her banging the entirety of her body against the door. shoulder first. i hear her move back a couple steps then run towards the door then collide with the door. she uses all of her body weight. slam! slam! slam!

"momma."

for souls like mine

i hear her again. slamming her exhausted body into the door. again and again and again. but the door refuses to open. and i am far too weak to stand and unlock the door myself. this bed is more like a magnet and my sweat sure is magnetic. the door is more like a cage and the bars sure are thick. slam! slam! slam!

"momma."

i hear her begin to cry. she screams out my name. she says she is doing the best that she can. i can hear the breaking of her heart. the tiredness in her voice. the loosening of her skin over her bones. she has gone on for far too long. she has tried to help me for far too long. she slams her body one last time into the door. but the door hardly even vibrates from the collision. i hear her body collapse onto the floor outside.

"momma..."

but momma can't save me now.

musician

deep down, i have always wanted to be a musician. i remember one night when i was six years old, my family crowded around the living room and we plugged a microphone into a stereo. it was that night i realized i wanted to be a musician. but, you see, the thing is i can't sing. that night, my family covered their ears with pain in their eyes. we never sang karaoke again.

but it was too late. the dream was already too deep inside my veins. i was destined to make music. i just needed to find a way. so i tried to play the drums. but my fifth-grade teacher told me i couldn't hold a beat. he told me my wrists were far too weak. he told me, maybe, i was cut out for something else. but certainly not music.

at eighteen, not yet ready to give up on my dreams, i went out and bought a guitar. but i couldn't quite figure it out. maybe it was the fact that i still couldn't hold a beat or the fact that my wrists were still far too weak. i don't know. all i know is that by the end of the week, i had already broken three strings and hadn't learned even one song.

so i became a poet, instead.

but deep down, i have always wanted to be a musician.

october 3rd

sometimes the stars align perfectly. sometimes you miss your bus and find yourself with an additional twenty minutes to kill. sometimes there is a coffee shop on the same corner as your bus stop. sometimes the love of your life is sitting in the corner booth of said coffee shop. and sometimes you have just enough courage to walk over and say hello.

well, today is october 3rd and none of those things happen for kamron.

instead, clouds fill the sky and cover every desire of the stars. kamron wakes right as his alarm goes off. he has mastered his morning routine. he arrives at the bus station thirteen seconds before the bus pulls up. he hops on and begins his morning commute. the love of his life, her name probably something like scarlett or lizabeth, really is sitting in the corner booth of that coffee shop this morning, but kamron isn't much of a coffee drinker and, let's be honest, scarlizabeth would never allow a man like kamron to even consider talking to her. he is not exactly *genetically gifted*. cursed? maybe. probably. most certainly. plus, there isn't a courageous bone in his lanky body. just anxiety flowing through his genetically cursed veins.

october 3rd is not a day for fairytales. there is no *once upon a time* and there is absolutely no *happily ever after*. in fact, you can forget all about scarlett or lizabeth or whatever other crush you are imagining in your head, because neither kamron nor you are ever going to end up with any of them. forget the happy endings your mother read to you as you dozed to sleep

as a kid. they are all bullshit. just like this smelly, overcrowded bus kamron rides every day to work.

after an hour has vanished from his life, kamron finally finds himself in front of his office building. he exits his bus and contemplates every decision that has led him to this very moment, then lets out a sigh for no reason other than it slightly delays his entrance to work. once the sigh has ended, he walks inside.

he finds himself in the familiar cubicle prison on the eighth floor. he says nothing to his coworkers as he walks by and they say nothing to him.

on kamron's desk, he finds the familiar mountain of manila folders. inside each of them, is a stack of paper filled with words that would put even the most passionate historian to sleep. he sits, grabs the top folder, and then drifts into daydreams.

at noon, kamron makes his way to the cafeteria. on a cracked tray, kamron gets some mashed potatoes from a box and microwaved turkey. he says no to the side salad, but yes to the soggy garlic bread. just as he did yesterday. and just as he will tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. it is tuesday, in case you were trying to figure it out.

he eats slowly, savoring every bite. not because the food is tasty in any way, but rather because his corporate overlords have sent many emails recently about employees who *sit idly by in the cafeteria after they have finished their lunches, when they should instead be contributing to making the company more successful*. in other words, once you're done eating, get the hell back to work, my sheep!

if kamron was wiser he would say yes to the side salad,

more food equates to more time spent eating. but, then again, if kamron was wiser he would not be stuck in this hellhole. kamron is constantly hindering himself with his own stupidity.

eventually, kamron finds himself back in his cubicle. in his absence, he was assigned a few new manila folders to work on. his stomach grumbles, even after years of consuming the same daily meal it has yet to adapt. kamron's eyes gloss over the folder's content, but his mind retains none of it. the clock overhead ticks and ticks and ticks and ticks.

finally, it strikes five. kamron is the first one out the door. he walks briskly to the bus stop, says nothing to the familiar faces, and begins his commute back home.

everything, all of october 3rd, goes exactly as it always does.

oh, just a side note, scarlizabeth met her future husband three days later on october 6th. they got married the following may. then divorced two decembers later.

but kamron will never meet her. not in a coffee shop. not at a bar. not anywhere.

because, like i said, fairytales are bullshit.

ryan david ginsberg

catch with dad

there is nothing quite as beautiful as a kid playing catch with their dad. at the moment, life is so simple. just you, your dad, and baseball. nothing has ever been so simple.

there is a gentle breeze. soft grass beneath your feet. and the popping sound of baseball against leather. the sound echoes in the air and in your ear.

but then you grow up. you find new friends to play catch with, instead. you communicate with your dad only through "hey"s and "see ya"s. you are completely unaware of your dad's glove gathering dust in the garage.

and life will never be quite so simple again.

cocoon

there is beauty in her timidness. though she would never admit it. her friends are what she likes to call *social butterflies*, but she seems stuck in her cocoon.

she would rather spend a friday night lying in bed with her head deep in another book of poetry. lost in the words. the rhythm. the soul.

but, unfortunately for our timid little protagonist, on this particular friday night, it is the butterflies who are in control. so she is forced to trade a good book for some shitty beer.

her cocoon is placed in the middle of a crowded room. surrounded by social butterflies and drunken wasps. shitty beer and even shittier music.

after a few minutes, her friends flutter away to mingle with some wasps. and she finds herself, once more, timidly hidden in the corner of the room. where she spends the next two hours simply observing butterflies and wasps in their natural habitat. beer spilled on the floor. and kisses that will soon be regretted.

all she wants is to race home. hide beneath the thick covers of her bed. and bury her head in a book of poetry.

she wonders what is wrong with her. why can't she just be a butterfly? she has been stuck in this cocoon for far too long.

it'll be years before someone finally points out the beauty of her timidness. you see, her timidness always led her to the corner of every room she found herself in. from that corner, she was left to just observe the world. and with those observations, she painted the walls of her cocoon.

kiss the girl!

the nerves flowed through my veins and pricked at the tip of my skin. my feet felt light as they glided up the driveway towards her front door. i tried to maintain the conversation, but all i could hear was the banging of my heart against my ribs, begging to be freed. my fingertips were growing numb and my palms growing more and more clammy.

though the trek from my car to her front door felt everlasting, all at once we had arrived at our path's end. i could feel the clamminess beginning to spread, as my body and hers squared and our eyes met. time paused at that moment. it leaned on the edge of its seat, wondering what we would do with its extension. the angels rose to peak down upon us and god prepared for the popping of champagne. the stars shined as bright as they could, only increasing the twinkle in her eye.

even with the backing of angels and the whisperings of god in my ear to *kiss the girl!* i still couldn't help but feel completely overcome by anxiety. i craved her with every ounce of my being. the atoms that so meticulously strung me together all attempted to rip apart in hopes of becoming closer to her.

finally, after what felt like millenniums, but most likely was only mere seconds, i took a deep breath and began to lean forward. i saw the edges of her lips begin to curl into a smile, then pucker as she leaned towards me. i closed my eyes and shortly felt her lips upon mine.

with a loud *boom!* i felt the cork fly off the bottle in heaven, i could hear the stars rejoicing in the sky, and i

for souls like mine

watched as time wiped tears of joy from its eyes. there were fireworks exploding, even if they only existed in the back of my mind.

the kiss didn't last long, but the feeling of her lips upon mine has lasted forever. our souls were introduced to one another that night and over the years they would come to know every inch of one another. but it all started with that one kiss, that one lean, that overcoming of nerves, just enough to listen to the whispers of god to *kiss the girl!*

eli's city

eli stares up at the wall that surrounded his city for centuries. this wall was first erected after the great war broke out amongst the land. this war led to brothers killing brothers and mothers killing children. the war was so much more than just physical. it was also mental and spiritual and morality was nearing extinction. so the wall was erected.

at first, the wall was small, just tall enough to make it difficult to climb. but as the war grew, so did the wall. eventually, famine hit the land surrounding eli's city. resulting in all of mankind being wiped from the earth.

except for eli's city.

now eli stares up at the wall and wonders what lies beyond it. his teachers tell him there is nothing but barren land. and that the poison still remains from the great war. one must never leave the city limits, they warn, one must never step foot beyond this wall. for only certain death awaits them beyond.

but eli's city still believes in the freedom to choose your own destiny. so every year, during the festival of freedom, the city wall is opened for anyone who may dare choose a new destiny. or rather, the first gate is opened. one must enter through the first gate, then wait for that first gate to be closed behind them. once closed, a second gate opens to the world beyond. they do it this way because eli's city cannot allow for the poisons of the outside world to enter their city limits. so they made two gates.

in the 372 years since the wall was fully erected, only one has ever chosen to leave. his name was jonah. the history books

describe him as mad. a rambling man. he performed so poorly in school that when assignment day came around he wasn't assigned a job. so, the historians say, jonah really had no other choice. he could have either lived out the rest of his meaningless and mad existence in a city he clearly did not belong in or he could leave and immediately end his miserable existence.

so, he chose to leave. a move, historians say, was made more out of cowardice than bravery.

but still, eli wonders what exists beyond this city wall. wonders whatever happened to jonah.

then eli hears the clock strike noon. he turns and breaks into a sprint. at noon, the clock strikes twelve times. on the twelfth strike, the festival of freedom begins. its attendance is mandatory. and, more importantly, so is the salute. which is what kicks off the festival. and it all begins at the conclusion of the twelfth strike. and tardiness is inexcusable.

eli runs as quick as he can. he feels the dust soaring into the air around him. the clock strikes for the seventh time. he can almost hear the footsteps in the city square.

it rings an eighth time and then a ninth and then a tenth. the city square comes into view. on the eleventh strike, eli sees right arms lift into the air and form fists. on the twelfth strike, eli nearly collides into the back of an old man. he then thrusts his fist into the air.

and in unison they chant:

*protect us, eli,
with this wall that you have provided us.
may we serve you*

ryan david ginsberg

*with every ounce of our being.
may we defend this wall
with our lives.
and if blood must be shed,
may we shed it with pride.*

i know you may be thinking, "but i thought the boy's name was eli?" it is. but eli was also the name of the man who built the wall. and the man who *our* eli nearly bumped into. and the woman on our eli's left. and the man walking towards the podium on stage. all of them are eli.

"welcome, eli, to the festival of freedom." eli erupts. "now, for the next twelve hours, may the gate be open to any fool who may choose to leave eli's city."

and with that, the gate opened in the distance. slowly. and again eli erupts, except for ours. he just watches with marvel in his eyes. and curiosity in the tip of his toes.

and, once more, he wonders of jonah's fate.

"now," says eli on stage, "let the festivities begin."

jonah was once eli. or so the historians claim. until the mysterious disappearance of his parents. whose bodies were never discovered. they say, the historians, that jonah's dna was tainted. that his dna is what caused his madness.

in the months following his parent's disappearance, he demanded to be called by a new name. jonah. the historians are unsure if it had any meaning or significance or if it was just another sign of his insanity. they decided it was most likely the latter.

the years passed and jonah's mind continued to decay. he

claimed falsities about eli's city that historians refused to even entertain long enough to jot down. then came assignment day. where, for the only time in eli's city's history, jonah was not assigned a job. so, for the next year, jonah just wandered the city streets.

before finally snapping.

on the festival of freedom, as the gate was preparing to close, he sprinted towards it.

towards his inevitable death, as the historians called it.

the following year, when the gate reopened, there was no sign of jonah inside. nothing he left behind. all that remained of jonah's existence were the words written by historians.

the festivities rage into the night. children run around screaming with joy. adults drink themselves silly. it is the only day all year where they don't need to attend their job. or, in our eli's case, school.

but then again, our eli won't be attending school tomorrow, either. for tomorrow is assignment day. in school, our eli makes exemplary marks. making him nearly a guarantee for a leadership position. like his father eli. who stood on stage and welcomed in the festival. there are no presidents or kings or queens or governors in eli's city. only eli's advocates. like our eli's father eli.

as our eli sits quietly in the city square, he begins to question if that is really how he wants to spend his life. exactly as his father has spent his. and exactly how his father's father spent his. he looks up at the wall and then out at the gate with lustful eyes.

* * *

ryan david ginsberg

with just ten minutes to midnight, the festival begins to come to an end. eli crowds around the stage once more. where our eli's father eli stands on stage. looking out at eli and his city.

then midnight strikes. and the fists rise in the air. and they salute once more.

but, this time, our eli doesn't form a fist. he doesn't raise his arm. he doesn't even open his lips to recite the salute. he just stares at the gate, which slowly begins to close in the distance. then he breaks into a sprint.

the salute ends and is immediately replaced with screams.

"eli!"

but which eli are they screaming for? eli of old? our eli? our eli's father eli? the old man eli who our eli nearly bumped into this afternoon? it is impossible to tell.

all i know for certain is that our eli slides just under the gate. then is greeted by darkness and complete silence as the gate shuts behind him. the sounds beyond the gate and the wall cannot be heard.

not from either side.

our eli wanders through the darkness. he feels upon the wall, seeking the gate that will set him free. he feels and he feels and he feels. but he never does find the gate.

eventually, though, he does find something.

bones.

goddamn rocks

sometimes i am running through a field with grass growing up beyond my knees. there is a rainbow overhead. and a smile across my face. i spread my arms as wide as they can go and i close my eyes. i run and i feel the air flowing through my hair.

but sometimes i stub my toe on a goddamn rock.

then the clouds roll in. and the rainbow disappears. and i feel raindrops on my head. and my toe really *fucking* hurts. then the grass dies. the entire field turns to a golden yellow. then melts away into a field of nothing but dirt and goddamn rocks for me to stub my toe on, again.

so i don't run. in fact, i hardly even move. because i still feel the pain in my toes and i am far too aware of all these goddamn rocks.

then the clouds open up. and a rainbow spreads majestically across the sky. and i frolic, once more, through a field with grass growing up beyond my knees. i spread my arms as wide as they can go, but i do not close my eyes. not anymore.

instead, my eyes are looking down. watching out for goddamn rocks.

farewell

do not expect me to mend your cuts while i lie here bleeding out. i've been your crying shoulder long enough! when is it my turn to shed a tear? i've heard all about your life a couple of times, can't i simply tell you about my day without you interrupting?

i am more than just a bed for the night, you know? more than a number on your phone. more than a shoulder to lean on and cry on. more than a sweater to keep you warm. there is blood inside my veins. a beating heart behind its cage. a soul hidden beneath bones. i am more than a tissue to be thrown out. you cannot recycle me! though i do breakdown quite easily.

your words don't die when they jump off your tongue. no, no, no. they live forever inside of my mind. i haven't forgotten the secrets you whispered to me in the dead of night. do you remember mine? or did i just swallow them down when you neglected to ask? did i cover up my scars, not for coldness, but for the obviousness that their stories were unwanted? can you remember how i looked that night? i remember everything about you. the red dress that flowed just an inch or so below your knees. the black high heels that you complained really hurt your feet. your freshly curled hair that took hours to accomplish, but you wanted the world to believe it was natural. the mascara running down your cheeks. your scars fully exposed. the moon shined so brightly on the both of us, that night, though i recollect a shadow cast over me.

this world is too big for you and me to always end up in

for souls like mine

the same room. you see, chapters always come to some sort of end. all stars burn out eventually. even the writings of sharpies fade away in time.

i guess what i'm saying is: i can't be your shoulder anymore. i refuse to hand you even the simplest of band-aids. don't extend your hand to me and ask for even a crumb of my bread—don't you understand that i already gave you the rest of the loaf? and i sure am hungry.

this one-way street has reached its conclusion. the ride was bumpy and, on occasion, the view was quite lovely. but as you can see, there is no longer anywhere left for us to journey.

so, farewell.

i hope your cuts make for beautiful scars. but i will no longer be there to hear their stories.

lovers and strangers

love has always had a large presence in my life. from a young age, i often believed myself to be deeply in it, only to discover it was nothing more than a glimmer that quickly faded away. as life went on, the glimmers became brighter and brighter. these glimmers included: vanessa and jessica and april and skylar and others whose names i can no longer remember. but as quickly as the love came, it vanished, and the strangers turned lovers turned strangers once more.

but despite all these failed loves, i never once gave up. i pursued love diligently. i pursued it with my every step and breath and heartbeat. if i believed a certain route had the possibility of leading to love, i would take it. no matter what i was leaving behind. love always came first.

which brings me to emilia.

it was late in may when we first met. at the time, i was living out my final days in new york city. you see, i had just accepted a job in los angeles that i was scheduled to begin in two weeks. it was the job i had been striving for my entire life. my entire career. i was ecstatic and eager to begin. but there were still a few things left for me in new york.

so, i sat down and made a list. *all the things i need do before leaving new york city*. one of the things on that list was to finally walk across the brooklyn bridge. i had lived in new york for nearly eight years and had never even stood on the bridge. i had driven across it in a taxicab on multiple occasions, but the feeling of walking across it with the crowd, i soon found out, was incomparable. tourists from every corner of the earth

walked across it with wonder in their eyes. the beautiful skyline towered behind me while selfie-sticks began to rise in front of me, almost mockingly.

as i reached the center of the bridge, i felt a tap on my shoulder. i turned.

“do you mind taking my picture?” the stranger asked me in the softest voice i had ever heard.

i was immediately mesmerized. lost in the intricate details of her irises. i couldn't even respond. my knees and lips and tongue were too weak. so all i did was silently stare.

the stranger lifted her hand to the loose hairs that had fallen over her face and brushed them behind her ear. she smiled small while biting her lower lip. then looked shyly off to the side.

i swallowed hard and finally whispered out, “sure.”

then her eyes met mine once more. i will never forget the sound of that first laugh. i came to memorize it over the years, but nothing will ever compare to hearing it for the first time. it was like hearing the sound of god. she handed me her camera then backed up, never breaking eye contact, until her back was against the railing of the bridge.

and with the snap of the camera, emilia entered my life.

a stranger soon to turn lover.

after taking her picture, i couldn't let her go. i asked if she wanted coffee. she said sure. so we walked the rest of the way across the bridge until we found ourselves in some quaint coffee shop in brooklyn with lattes in our hands.

that following morning, i turned down my dream job in los angeles and begged my old boss to rehire me. he did. i took

a severe pay cut. totally worth it.

from that point forward, emilia and i were attached at the hip. the word *love* first slipped off the tip of my tongue after three weeks, but i felt it the moment our eyes first met.

after eight months, i got down on one knee. and told her everything i had wanted to tell her since that may afternoon.

late in july, emilia and i stood in front of all our friends and family and a few third cousins that our parents forced us to invite and declared our love to them all.

our reception was beautiful. it was filled with everyone we loved, and those third cousins i mentioned earlier, yet all emilia and i wanted was to be alone. it was an outdoor wedding, so we decided to go deep into the woods. where it would just be the two of us.

hand in hand, we ran until the disco lights and the sounds of others could no longer penetrate our private moment. we ran and we ran and we ran. until finally, we were alone in the woods. i grabbed her by the waist and we swayed back and forth to the music in our heads. i smiled at my wife. and swore to myself that there was nothing that could ever bring me down from that high.

but highs do not exist without lows. where it ebbs, it flows.

emilia and i had been taught about love all our lives. we were taught to find someone you love and to marry them. for us, marriage was the finish line. once we said the magical words *i do*, we had won the game and there was no longer anything left to play.

we stopped chasing the romance that once burned so fiercely within the both of us. i stopped holding the door open

for her and she stopped falling asleep on my chest. i stopped reminding her of how beautiful she was and she no longer sent me loving text messages in the middle of the day.

we had mistaken the first lap as the entire race. so, as we slowed down and came to a stop, love and romance continued to run. and by the time we realized the race wasn't over, it was too late. our love had lapped us so many times that there was no way we would ever be able to catch it. we lost a race we thought we had already won.

i wish i could sit here and tell you that the end of our marriage was handled maturely, but i don't want to start lying now. we dragged lawyers into the room by the tip of their toes and had them write and rewrite novels about our possessions and to whom they would go to. neither of us wanted to live in the house we once called a home, so we sold it to another hopeless couple with a destiny similar to ours. we split the profits with a middleman to hand us the checks, as we didn't want to risk our hands touching the dust of what our love once was.

in just a few short years, i went from falling in love to defeating love to having it all slip away. my life fell apart before my very eyes and all i could do was watch as it collapsed. and as the dust covered my skin.

the story of emilia and i is old news. our love crashed and burned nearly seven years ago. since her, i have met many girls and even fallen in love with a couple of them, though those loves also ended with goodbye. it would be a lie to say emilia doesn't still cross my mind every now and again. out of all my failed loves, my failed love with her will always hurt the most.

ryan david ginsberg

losing emilia was like discovering god and watching him walk away. the pain will always remain, but the pain never felt more real than it did the other night. i walked into a restaurant with a buddy of mine. as we headed towards our table, i saw emilia across the room, sitting at a table with another man.

time froze, as it did so often when emilia was involved, but this time it was agonizing. our eyes met and locked for multiple seconds. i smiled, but all she did was turn away. she looked at the man across from her and gave him that sideways glance i always loved so much. at that moment, our entire history flashed before my eyes: the bridge, our first *i love you*, the proposal, our wedding, and the war that ensued.

and with the slight turn of her head, i realized it was gone. forever erased from history as if it had never happened at all.

our eyes had locked once more, no longer as lovers, but as strangers.

for souls like mine

it's cold outside

it's cold outside. or maybe it's all in my head. all i know for sure is i am wearing a snow jacket while my thermometer says it is one-hundred and four degrees fahrenheit.

people look at me like i am mad. and maybe i am. but i think they are the fools for wearing tank tops and flip-flops in this blizzard.

or maybe it's all in my head.

ryan david ginsberg

here, with him

i lie here. staring up at the night sky. with his hand held tightly in mine. i wish every night could be like tonight. with just him and the stars overhead and our whispers just slightly louder than the breeze.

life is so simple. here, with him.

but life extends beyond just the two of us. beyond just this park. beyond just this night.

the kids at school don't seem to understand. they scream out names as we walk to lunch. i squeeze his hand tightest on those afternoons. not out of affection, but out of fear.

but on nights like tonight, there is only affection in my squeezing. only joy in my whispers. only love in my laughter.

life is so simple. here, with him.

but life extends beyond the two of us.

small town, big stars

i sit on top of a hill that happens to be the tallest in my small town. it is only 50 feet or so above the one lane road below, but i can see everything from up here. quiet homes. an empty gas station with two vacant pumps. a water tower that proudly exclaims the name of my small town. most kids my age come up here to smoke weed and make out in the backseat.

but not me.

i'm here to get closer to the stars. i watch as they twinkle so brightly. they seem so small, but really it is me that is small. it is the hill and the water tower and the two-pump gas station and this town.

i watch the stars. and wonder if anyone is watching back.

chapter one from a novel that never was

my car is packed with only the essentials. a duffle bag filled with clothes. a pillow and blanket. a box of books. and a backpack filled with notebooks and pens. all snuggled into the backseat of my honda civic.

then in the front seat is me and my head filled with far too many dreams. as i drive cross country to the land where dreams like mine are bound to come true: hollywood.

i am a writer. that is a new thing i am saying. *i am a writer*. you see only a few weeks ago, i would have said i was *aspiring* to be a writer, but i am no longer aspiring to write. i *am* writing. so, in that case, i *am* a writer. the basic definition of aspiring is *to be hopeful to achieve something*. in fact, some synonyms for aspiring are: *wishful*, *aiming*, and even *wannabe*. but that is not what i am when it comes to writing. i am not hoping to write someday, i am not aiming to write sometime in the future, and i am not a goddamn wannabe. i am doing it. so no longer can i hope to write, wish to write, aim to write, or want to write. all i can do is write.

i *am* a writer.

allow me to use aspiring in its proper context. right now, i am nearing the border of colorado. so, in this case, i am in kansas, but i aspire to be in hollywood. i hope to be in hollywood, i wish to be there, i aim to be there, i want to be there. i am currently in kansas, but i aspire to be in hollywood. where i can continue to be a writer.

although my face and my heart are both equally filled with hope, there is still a deep sorrow buried within me. i know it

for souls like mine

will soon claw its way to the surface of my being. i know i will soon find myself weak and on my knees with tears streaming down my cheeks, damping my shirt as i try to dry them off. i know that, eventually, i will be filled with regret, but right now it is hidden deep inside. i will speak on the subject only briefly, as to not push the inevitable breakdown even closer than it needs to be. i will speak of it only in tidbits, in short summaries, lacking any real detail, because anything else would be too much for me to handle. i am just so *goddamn* happy right now, but you need to understand how much i am leaving behind so you can truly understand how much i am not only aspiring, but i am doing.

okay.

i come from a town in northern missouri. the town is unimportant, hell the state is unimportant, the only thing that is important about my past is that there is a girl named olivia. if you are one of those folks who believe in soulmates then you would undoubtedly categorize olivia and me as soulmates. we had been together nearly all of high school. *had* been together. had, but no longer.

i'm sorry, i need to divert my mind momentarily to a different subject, but i promise you i will come back to olivia. in the sense of story, that is.

my past wasn't necessarily filled with close friends. there were the occasional acquaintances. the ones i would talk to in math class or during lunch hours, but never anything more than that. never friends i would chat with on the weekends. never friends i would go to movies with or dinner with or have sleepovers with. i never had any friends like that. just acquaintances in math class. that's it.

you see, i didn't need friends. nor did i want them. time on this earth is limited and i didn't want to waste my time on anyone. then came olivia. and suddenly i found myself wanting to spend every second of my time on her. her and i were together always. in fact, most of the air i breathed first filtered through her very lungs before entering mine. everything seemed better when it was first involved with her. i believe i am the man i am today because i was first involved with her. i am not necessarily a *good* man. after what i did to olivia, it's hard for me to believe that i was ever a good man. but i swear to you i am a *better* man today because of her.

no matter the sins i have committed. they are far less than the sins i would have committed without her.

well, it appears i no longer aspire to be in colorado, because i have officially crossed the border. i don't think i fully anticipated how long of a drive this really was going to be. i feel like a marathon runner who decided to sprint the first three miles and am now running low on energy far too early in the race. to be fully honest, there wasn't much planning that went into any of this. a week ago, i was still trying to decide between going to college at mizzou or making this move to hollywood. though this debate only existed inside my own mind. according to everyone else, i was always going to mizzou. but i never felt like mizzou was really the right move.

my parents were devastated when i told them i was moving to hollywood, instead. but they weren't devastated in a *you-are-throwing-your-life-away* kind of way. instead, they were devastated in a *what-am-i-going-to-tell-my-friends?* type of way. you see, my parents are all about mizzou. they both went to mizzou and met in mizzou and got married just around the

corner from mizzou and they still hold season tickets to mizzou's football team. we have an entire room in our house dedicated to mizzou. both of my parents have had *proud mizzou parent* stickers on their rear windows ever since the day i accepted my invitation to attend. to them, there was never a debate. mizzou was a certainty. how much i would love to watch them scrape those stickers off their cars. watch as their cheeks turn red when those in the stands ask them how i'm enjoying my first year at mizzou.

but my parents weren't the only ones devastated by my decision. they weren't the only ones unaware of the internal debate going on silently inside of my head.

there was also olivia.

i didn't know how to tell her. for weeks, i couldn't sleep. i was so anxious. then finally, after i packed my car with only the essentials, on the night before the both of us were set to leave for mizzou, i drove to her house. i climbed the ivy on the side of her house and knocked on her bedroom window. she opened it and i climbed inside.

"what are you doing here?" she whispered to me.

and then i told her. i told her i had dreams that i could no longer delay. i told her that love and destiny don't always travel the same path. sometimes we are lucky enough to hold our soulmates in our arms for a while, but eventually, we need to let them go so we can do what we were always meant to do. of course, i wish she was sitting in my passenger seat at this very moment. but the stars don't always align the way we wish that they would. sometimes destiny is stronger than even the strongest of loves. sometimes love isn't always meant to last. you see, writing is my destiny. and destiny is a thing we cannot

ignore. it is a thing that we have to do. we have no choice. it is mandatory.

i love olivia, of course i do. in fact, i love olivia even more than i love writing. i love her more than the air in my lungs. more than i could ever love anyone or anything. but there is this aching in my heart, this voice in my head, this shouting from the heavens, this magnet in my foot dragging me to where i need to be. destiny is a strong thing. and it refuses to be ignored.

i had to make the move. i had to, i had to, i had to.

but still, i could see the breaking of olivia's heart in front of my eyes. the tears poured out of her like a dam giving in to centuries of pressure. i held her in my arms, but she shoved me away. i guess i don't really blame her. i would have shoved me away, too. but these decisions were not mine. they were demanded by destiny. assigned by the stars. unavoidable.

she asked me to go. or rather she told me it was okay for me to go. for really it was me who climbed into her window to let her know that i was going.

i climbed back down the ivy. got into my car. and began my drive to hollywood. where i aspire to be.

sunrise

the first ray has already made its way onto the horizon. i've always loved the sunrise, no matter how often i see it. there is something majestic about seeing a king lose its crown every night and coming back to fight for it every morning. as if to say, "this is my kingdom and i will not abandon you."

but little does it know, its kingdom worships new gods every night in its absence. or maybe the sun knows exactly this but loves the kingdom so much that it comes back, regardless.

despite the story behind the sunrise, it is beautiful. and i will always admire it and strive to find the pureness within myself that replicates even a fraction of that single ray. the first one on the horizon. every morning. no matter how loudly we worship the moon and the stars.

the sun always returns.

ryan david ginsberg

only yours

i hear the way you say my name, but i think i may be misinterpreting the intentions of your tone. you say my name with a smile, every time, like there is joy found in its every syllable.

but yet you tell me you are in love with another man. which is fine. you are not mine. only yours. but still, i can't help but notice that you don't seem to smile when you say his name.

not, at least, like you do when you say mine.

but you are not mine. only yours.

the thing is, i am deeply in love with you. the way your entire body shakes when you laugh. the way you curl up on the couch when we watch a movie after another rough day. and the way i can't help but smile every damn time i say your name.

but you are not mine. only yours. and i am not yours. only mine. we are two souls. two beings. with two separate sets of needs.

but i sure do love the way you smile when you say my name.

a somewhat neurotic boy and his dog named blue

it all happened so quick. a roller coaster of emotions that left me on my knees, my face buried in my hands.

but let's start at the beginning.

actually, let's start slightly before the beginning.

with a somewhat neurotic boy. me.

my mental health goes up and down. some months are good. some months are okay. and some months are disastrous. this month happened to be one of the latter. i felt like my entire world was crashing over me. my chest felt so heavy i was sure i was about to collapse. i couldn't breathe most days. i couldn't sleep most nights. i couldn't eat or think or open my eyes without wanting to cry.

i screamed out for a sign.

okay, now let's fast forward to the beginning.

my girlfriend and i were on our way home from a night out. we pulled into her neighborhood. and then parked in front of her house. it was then that we spotted a little white dog running around. lost. confused. helpless. as soon as i stepped out of the car she came running towards me. she jumped up and down against my leg as if to say, "save me! save me! save me!"

i didn't know what to do. i hesitated. i turned towards my girlfriend. as i did, the dog leaped into her arms. all four pounds of her.

she wore no collar. no way to identify where she belonged.

we walked around the neighborhood searching for her owner. but nobody claimed her as theirs. even in just those few minutes, i already felt a tugging on my heart. she licked my fingers with her tiny, bumpy tongue. the dog, not my girlfriend. she wagged her tail with joy when she looked at us. again the dog, not my girlfriend. my girlfriend simply wagged her nose against the dog's nose.

it was late. middle of the night. the spca was closed. this dog was covered in dirt. so we brought her inside. we gave her a bath. she slept in between us that night. or rather she slept and i had anxious dreams about having to give her back to her rightful owners.

please, i begged no one in particular, let me keep her. i need her.

it had only been twelve hours, but i had already fallen in love. she followed me everywhere i went. we walked around the house, her like my shadow. i wanted to give her the world. but she wasn't my dog. not yet, anyway.

as soon as the spca opened that next morning, we drove her over. there they checked to see if there was a chip inside her. (*chips are placed in dogs with their owner's information. therefore if the dog is lost, like this dog was lost, the owner's can be identified.*) my heart was racing as we drove over. i couldn't breathe or think or see the lines on the road. *i can't give this dog up. i just can't.* my girlfriend had to sit in the car with me to calm me down. she squeezed my hand and whispered to me gently. i could already feel the tears forming behind my sunglasses. anxiety was heavy on my chest. thoughts swirled through my chaotic mind.

there was no chip in her. they said they had no calls

concerning a dog that fit her description. so we filled out a report. gave them our number and address and took pictures of the dog.

"if there is no call for three days, on the fourth she is considered yours."

four days. that's all i needed to wait. four days! and she would be mine.

when we got home, my girlfriend and i laid in bed, the dog lying in between us, and we talked about our future. every scenario already involved the dog. "we'll need to get a house with a big backyard so she'll have lots of room to run."

my girlfriend suggested that we name her *blue*.

so blue it was.

on day two, i had to leave her home alone. i had work. i waved goodbye to her with tears in my eyes. i could hear her whining and crying as i walked towards my car. or maybe it was me who was whining and crying. i wanted to run back to the room and grab her. hold her tight against my chest. whisper that i would never leave her. but i had to. i had work to go to and bills to pay. plus, i needed money to buy her toys.

i wanted to give her the world. and that involved leaving her home alone for a few hours as i went to work.

those first few hours felt like they would never end. i couldn't get blue off my mind.

during lunch, i raced home. i only had thirty minutes and i usually spent my lunches at work, but i needed to see her. when i got home her tail was wagging and she jumped into my arms.

it was nice to be wanted so unconditionally.

i let her out really quick to use the restroom. but had to put her back in my room when i left.

(quick side note: my roommate had a dog. a german shepherd that was big enough and just wild enough to kill blue. accidentally, of course. the german shepherd spent the days in the backyard. it was for this reason i had to leave blue inside my room. for safety measures. not to mention the fact she has a record of running away.)

the next few hours went by even slower than the hours prior. when i finally got home the second time, it was a different scene that i discovered. there was still blue with a wagging tail and a tongue ready to lick, but there was also poop scattered all over the room. and all over her.

i began to cry.

this was for two reasons. one, i hated to see blue like that. covered in her own poop. completely unaware of what she had even done. and two, i knew that this scene made my case for keeping her even more difficult with my roommates. they were already hesitant about a second dog. and this would not help.

i quickly cleaned the mess with tears in my eyes. i gave her a second bath. i held her tight, no longer sure of how many hugs were left.

when i finally gained some sort of control over myself, i called my mother. she told me i was overreacting. it's fine, her and my father would help me train her while i was at work.

i tried to calm myself down. just two more days. *two more days* and blue would be mine.

just try to breathe.

* * *

it was the morning of day number three and blue had still yet to be claimed. she licked my face to wake me up. her small, bumpy tongue leaving my face wet and filled with a smile. i threw on my robe and walked her to the backyard. she ran around in the grass with a wagging tail and a smile across her face. then she ran towards me and jumped into my arms.

i wanted to cry. i was so happy. i whispered, "one more day, that's it. just one more day." not sure if i was whispering to her or to myself. i whispered it again.

i got all of her stuff and threw it in the backseat of my car. she sat on my lap as we drove to my parent's house. her tail wagging and her tongue sticking out. it felt so right. her and i. like we were always meant to be.

all day at work i thought about her. it wasn't day number four quite yet, but it was close enough. i spent the entire day googling how to potty train a dog. i was so excited to pick her up. i was going to take her to the pet store. i planned out which toys i was going to buy her. what kind of dog tag i was going to get *blue* etched onto. i couldn't wait to get off work and see her. hold her. feel her tongue against my cheek.

when i walked into my parent's house, blue came running. her tail wagging and that gorgeous smile across her face. she jumped into my arms. my arms, where she belonged. she licked my face and i kissed the top of her head.

"you want to go buy some toys? huh, blue?" i took her licks as a yes.

then my mother came around the corner. her face wore concern.

"what?" i asked. "did she poop in the house?"

she shook her head.

ryan david ginsberg

my heart raced in my chest. my breath deepened. i swallowed. "then what is it?"

"we found her owner."

i felt my knees weaken. i looked down at blue, she licked my face. she licked the tears off my cheek.

her tongue had magical powers, but they weren't quite magical enough. for in the moment, i again felt the weight of the world.

and it was far too heavy for such a somewhat neurotic boy like me.

dancing in the street

the moonlight reflected brightly off her eyes, only sharpening the blue and grey that intertwined within them. her black dress flowed and dragged ever-so-slightly on the ground behind her. the streetlights, though assigned a destination, couldn't help but tilt their light wherever she went. the breeze flowed through the entire street, but lingered for just a moment too long on her blonde hair, causing it to flow much like the dress below.

on her right-hand side was me—a simple man completely captivated by the masterpiece to my left. me, such an evil man with such evil thoughts and such evil desires. how did the demons in my mind end up in the same universe as this angel by my side? oh, how i was completely in love.

as if the breeze was making music in her ear only for her, she began to twirl through the middle of the street. the leaves blew from the trees and danced circles around her feet. even the trashcans lining the side of the street couldn't help but nod their heads along to the beat. she reached her hand out towards me and i grabbed on tight. i spun her once, then twice, her heartbeat serving as my music, her serving as my muse. not a second floated by where i was unamused with that girl.

we danced until the breeze faded away and the night faded away and the leaves faded away and until the air within her lungs faded away.

and now i dance alone.

looking for home

i'm at a loss for words. my soul is crying out, but it's inaudible with its tears. it's silent with its screams. my chest is numb. i can't breathe nor see nor desire. i am nothing!

this feeling is not new. or rather, this lack of feeling. this numbness in my skin and in my veins and in my mind. it is familiar. so close to my heart that i can nearly call it family. not a loving grandmother, though. more like an uncle drinking himself silly in the corner during thanksgiving dinner. singing at the top of his lungs. ensuring he cannot be ignored.

they blame it on my perspective. my mindset. *happiness is a choice*. fuck you! i guess i chose incorrectly.

don't look at me with those eyes, you know that i hate it. mother, i said i am fine! i'm only speaking my mind. i find comfort with a pen in my hand, a page filled with confessions, headphones choking the world out with some kendrick.

i'm only looking for home. but every time i nearly find it it just slips through my fingertips. my mind is changing every minute, the world keeps spinning, and i am incapable of keeping up. i can't breathe. i can't think. i can't stay. i can't leave. maybe i'll just sleep the fucking demons away.

i have two sides, the war is never-ending. i'm losing on both sides. i'm losing with my every step and every breath and every thought that i spill on the page. my pen is leaking my truths, i need to contain it, the ink is staining my skin. i'm an open book with sentences that don't fucking make sense! i hope you can decipher my words.

i'm only looking for home.

for souls like mine

more than words

i want you to know how beautiful you really are. unfortunately, words can never do it justice. i should know. i just spent the past two weeks flipping through every dictionary i could find. in every language you taught me with that magical mind.

you deserve the world. and the galaxy it is wrapped inside of. you are a star, baby, and i'm more than fine with spending my life in your orbit.

you are the wonder that leaves the pyramids wondering.
and you are so much more than words could show.

austin

my name is austin. i am quote, unquote *popular*. i fucking hate that word, but that is unimportant to the story i am trying to tell you here. the story i am trying to tell is about me. about my life. and about how fucking disgusting of a human being i am.

i am the quarterback who is, stereotypically, dating the hottest girl at my school. and she is, stereotypically again, the head cheerleader. i am currently playing usnavi, the lead, in our school musical *in the heights*. i live in a house that is far too big for a family of three. one of those houses with a movie theatre in the basement. the ones with a huge ass pool and two jacuzzis, just for the hell of it. and my parents are just slightly too perfect.

my life is like a fucking john hughes movie and i hate myself for it.

kids look at me with envy in their eyes. as they should. on the surface, my life is fucking perfect.

me? i am far from perfect.

this life seems to have been given to the wrong boy. because i sure as hell don't deserve it. i don't deserve the money and the love and the school that treats me like a god. i don't deserve these things my parents keep buying me and i sure as hell don't deserve my parents. you see, my mother got very sick when she was pregnant with me. the doctor told her to abort, but my mother stubbornly and foolishly refused. the doctor told her i would kill her and the chances of my survival were only 2%, she said i was worth the risk. like how the *fuck*

can you tell me i deserve a mother like that? a fucking *goddess*. but somehow the goddess gave birth to the demon that is me. my parents call me their *little miracle*. but i am far from a miracle. i'm more of a... what is the antonym of miracle? a catastrophe? a cataclysm? an apocalypse?

i don't know. all i know is i'm no miracle. and i don't deserve the praise this world so foolishly bestows upon me.

my mother tells me i spend too many saturday nights alone at home. you see, my cell phone is always blowing up at the dinner table with party invitations. and my mother wonders why i never accept them.

it's because i already know how the party will go. the same way it always does.

i'll walk in and immediately all eyes will be on me. where they will remain for the duration of the party. i'll get far too drunk, just trying to forget my horrendous existence. i'll end up fighting with my girlfriend. she, rightfully so, doesn't trust a single bone in my pathetic body. she won't like the way amber or rebekah are looking at me. lustful eyes and bitten lower lips. shirts hanging a little too low. and skirts just a little too short. and my girlfriend will be right to not like their stares. considering i fucked them both just last week. we'll argue. she'll leave. upset. and i won't even bother chasing her. i never do. i'll be far too drunk and i'll probably have another girl or two under my arms before the door even fully slams shut with her departure.

guys will look at me with jealousy in their eyes. girls will look at me with sex on their mind.

i am a horrible human being.

and my girlfriend is not. here, i have named two girls who i fucked and i haven't even mentioned my girlfriend's name yet.

it is jenifer. that's her name. and jenifer is fucking perfect. angelic. far too good for a person like me. like everything else in my life. but god keeps handing me more shit i don't need. nor deserve. and i just keep taking it. greed on my fingertips. i take and i take and i take.

so, i'd rather spend saturday nights at home.

though i'd be lying if i said i didn't respond to rebekah's text at 2 am. twenty minutes later, she was climbing through my bedroom window and we fucked a couple times.

and jenifer never once crept into my mind. i was too lost in rebekah's skin.

on friday afternoons, during football season, my school puts on pep rallies in the cafeteria. the bleachers fill and for thirty minutes my school treats us football players like royalty. me being their king.

the cheerleaders, including jenifer and amber and rebekah, all come out and dance. then the band plays a song. then the principal asks me to come out and lead the school in our rally chant.

they fucking worship me.

those idiots.

can't they see?

i'm no god. just a pathetic excuse for a human being. sure, i can throw a football sixty yards, but does that really make me worthy of all this? this fucking rally and all these girls with my name painted on their shirts and all these guys who threaten

anyone who looks at me slightly the wrong way.

and that's just friday afternoons.

you have no idea about the shit these people do on friday nights.

the entire stadium fills to the point of overcapacity. with boys who want to be me and girls who want to fuck me and parents who wish their kids would be exactly like me and my perfect parents who never miss even a single fucking one of my games. they will be there cheering the loudest. holding signs with my name on them. they fucking love me so much.

and all i do is spoil it.

all i do is spoil everything.

but not on the field. on the field, i am golden. i haven't lost a game in my four-year high school career. colleges from all over the nation won't stop calling me. offering me cars and clothes and shoes on the low. i have thirteen gold chains at home that i've never worn. all from colleges i won't even legitimately consider attending.

but i'll take every free thing they offer me. like i said, i have greedy fingertips.

and i always win. every goddamn friday night. the boys and the girls rush the field. the first one to hug me is always jenifer. every fucking time, it is jenifer. that girl loves me so much when she's sober. before the alcohol finally forces her to stand up for herself. before the alcohol reminds her that she is better than this pathetic affection i pretend to give her. when she's sober she is so goddamn insecure. thinking she deserves the bullshit i am constantly giving her. and i know i'm to blame. for her insecurities. before me, she held her head high and her shoulders back. before me, she was always smiling. so

carefree. but of course, i fucked that all up. that's all i ever seem to do. i made her insecure. made her feel like she needs to *fight* for love. when she shouldn't. she deserves the whole goddamn world. but she got stuck with me, instead.

i wish she would just leave me, already. because i am far too weak to leave, myself. and i am far too selfish to give up somebody as incredible as her.

friday nights.

i fucking hate myself the most on friday nights.

because deep down, i think they're fucking right to worship me.

i am a god on that field.

but off the field, i am the fucking devil.

i break hearts and fuck anyone with a low enough self-esteem to climb through my window at 2 am. i wonder how the rest of the world doesn't see it. it's so damn obvious. the whole goddamn world is either blind or naive or ignorant or maybe they just *need* something to worship. and foolishly they chose me.

my parents think i am some perfect child. my teachers think i'm some fucking prodigy. my theatre director thinks i could be the next leonardo, you know, if football doesn't work out. girls are always stuffing their panties in my locker. and guys are always fist bumping me every time i walk past them in the hall.

only jenifer knows who i really am. but she is too fucking insecure to do anything about it. she comes to my house every morning with a cup of iced coffee and a croissant. every fucking morning. without fail. then she drives me to school in

the red bmw her daddy bought her on her sixteenth birthday.

she doesn't say a word about my antics that past weekend. she just goes on with the conversation as if everything were so fucking dandy. like our life was some fairytale and we're the prince and princess who live happily ever after.

she doesn't mention amber or rebekah or any of the other rumors circulating the school halls. all of which were probably true. there aren't many girls i won't fuck.

jenifer knows my flaws. the evilness that flows through my veins. the fraud behind the smile. but she does nothing about it. she just grabs my hand and parades me through the halls. as if our love deserved to be on some fucking pedestal. maybe she has watched too many movies—tricked herself into believing that she has no other choice but to date the hot quarterback. it's just a goddamn john hughes movie. and we're just living the fucking american high school dream.

but i can't blame this all on her. i am a goddamn smooth talker. i could talk myself out of prison only moments after committing murder in front of the cops' and judges' and juries' very eyes. many times, jenifer has walked in on me mid-fuck. and every single time i end up fucking her before the night is over.

i am the goddamn snake that convinced eve to eat the apple.

or maybe jenifer is eve. and i am the apple she bit. and now she is stuck to live with her sin.

i should kill myself. i know that i should. it only makes sense. if the world refuses to see me for the piece of shit that i am, if jenifer won't leave me, if my parents won't stop

ryan david ginsberg

drowning me with all this love, if god won't stop handing me the whole goddamn world on a golden platter, if i can't stop my silver tongue, then maybe it is my responsibility to rid the earth of me. before i burn the whole thing down.

i stole my father's gun a few months back. i have it lying loaded beneath my bed right this very moment. many nights, i have sat on my bed with his gun in my hand. staring down the barrel. trying to will myself to shoot my fucking brains out. but i just can't seem to do it.

i may fucking hate myself, but i am far too egotistical to end my own life.

i may be a devil, but at times i can be a fucking god.

and sometimes the world needs both.

or maybe they just need something to worship.

or maybe i'm just the apple eve decided to bite. and now the world must live with their sin.

imitating gods

all he sees are brake lights in front of him. the sound of angry commuters obnoxiously honking is beginning to drive him mad. so, he reaches for the radio knob and turns it on.

they are talking about politics. that is all anybody seems to talk about nowadays. but he pays it no mind. he's so sick of hearing about senators and presidents and congressmen attempting to play god to humanity. their fragile egos pretending they really have any control over any of this. it's laughable. as if their militaries could really stop the uprising of an entire civilization. they use wars for practice. they all just pretend to have power and the people just pretend to believe them. but every one of the imitating gods knows all it takes is the tiniest gust of wind for an entire society to crumble. for an entire kingdom to fall apart.

there is so much traffic on this highway.

he reaches for the radio knob and changes the channel.

even they are talking about politics. the country is going to war with somebody somewhere over something unimportant. the youth is about to be shipped overseas. they are told they are fighting for our freedom.

but are they really?

i mean, who bombed who?

he reaches for the radio knob and turns it off.

there is so much traffic on this highway.

too many simple minded fools attempting to play god.

and far too many people just blindly playing along.

on-screen

she wanted the lives she saw on tv. with the big houses and fast cars. with the cameras that followed her every move, because her every move was spectacular. she wanted the limousine on a wednesday afternoon, filled with only two or three of her closest friends, as they drove to lunch only a couple miles away.

she wanted the lights and the cameras. the fame and the fortune. the paparazzi that were always waiting outside her door. the articles about her in every tabloid on the shelf. she wanted the wild jersey nights and the beverly hill mansions.

she wanted it all, but she would've been fine with settling for less. she didn't necessarily need the lives she saw on tv. she would have been fine with the lives she saw on her telephone screen. the lives with vacations that seem to never end. belize and hawaii and disneyland for the fourth time this month. the happy couples with date nights on a tuesday. concerts every other weekend. all the gorgeous selfies.

how did they look so pretty? how did they get so happy?

yes, all she wanted was a life on-screen. television or telephone. as long as it had filters. and editors. and anything to rid herself of her blemishes. and her scars. and her goddamn broken heart.

because life is hard. but it always looks so easy on-screen.

tupac or biggie?

tupac or biggie?

they ask me as if there needs to be an answer. as if greatness has a definitive scale. as if there can only be one all-time great. as if rap was a competition and not simply an expression of soul.

tupac or biggie?

i ask them what about kendrick? jay? lauryn hill? or do you need to die before you can reach greatness? as if we cannot fully enjoy your art until the final period has been placed at the end of it all. not until it is scratched into stone, never to be altered again.

tupac or biggie?

what about cube? nas? kanye?

tupac or biggie?

what about method man? eminem? black thought?

tupac or biggie?

what about andre? big pun? cole?

tupac or biggie?

we were blessed enough to get them both! let's just appreciate that.

infinite stories

there are infinite stories flowing through the veins of humanity. stories of hope and stories of devastation. stories of empires expanding and stories of empires crumbling into dust. stories of birth and death and passion and heartbreak. there are stories within each of us and the veins of humanity never stop telling stories.

standing over a crib is a mother and father. they stare in at their three-month-old daughter. she looks up at them with wonder in her eyes. her father covers his eyes and uncovers them with a "peek-a-boo," which sends the baby into a giggle. it is a quiet giggle, yet it still manages to rattle the bars of the crib and the rib cages of her mother and father.

standing over a grave is an eighty-nine-year-old man. he holds flowers in his hands and looks down at a tombstone that reads the name of his wife. the mother of his four kids. his hands are cold. typically on a cold night like tonight his fingers would be wrapped against her warm skin. but his hands have been cold for nearly thirteen years now. he sets the flowers down.

standing over a desk is an eighteen-year-old girl. she is refreshing her computer every five seconds. today is the day her dream college is sending out their acceptance letters. she has worked tirelessly her entire life for this one moment. her father dropped out of high school at sixteen. her mother dropped out at seventeen. the fact that she is only two months away from earning her high school diploma is a miracle in and of itself. but she has always strived for more than just a simple

miracle. she is one who stands at the edge of the universe and asks it for more. she is always striving for more.

standing in the middle of the living room is a twenty-seven-year-old man. in front of him are two couches filled with loved ones. a couple more stand behind the couches and even more lean against the wall in the back of the room. he has asked them all to be here tonight. he figured it would be easier this way. to say it just once and never again. he wipes a tear from his cheek and looks up at the ceiling. he can't look them in the eyes, not tonight. "i," he begins. he wipes another tear against his sleeve. "i have cancer."

there are infinite stories flowing through the veins of humanity. and the veins of humanity never stop telling stories.

remember us

i have always felt as if the sky and i were linked in some ineffable manner. as if the sun and the clouds and the stars were all under my command. just waiting for my every order.

on this particular night, the sky cries out. the town slowly floods. streets overflow. families hide inside their homes, unsure of how to live in such a wet world.

you see, up until tonight, this town hasn't seen rain in nearly two scores. but i guess it was inevitable that i would one day run out of whiskey and all that it dammed would gush from the clouds.

i am the only soul wandering the streets tonight. i walk past street signs and graffitied walls i haven't seen in years. this route used to be a second home to me. i would take this same route every night with the moon full in the star-studded sky.

i had pep in my step back then, but tonight the journey isn't quite the same. the moon is nowhere to be seen, the stars are silent, and the sky is roaring. two scores of pent-up thunder echoes through the sky and vibrates my entire being. an occasional streak of lightning lunges ferociously toward my small town as if an attempt to destroy the bitterness of its very soul.

i jump the fence separating me from the local football stadium. i look around and study the details; it is so different from what i used to know. the field is no longer dirt with tiny patches of grass, but rather bright green turf. the scoreboard is digital and plagued with advertisements. the home bleachers are taller and wider than back in the day, though this small

town hasn't grown nearly as much in population.

from the sky, a streak of light plummets down, hitting the top of the flagpole. i watch as the lightning wraps and tornadoes down toward the ground below. with a loud crack, the cement separates and snakes in my direction. i pray that the earth may open and swallow me whole, but the snake ends at the tip of my toe. the sky thunders again with a mocking laugh.

i make my way to the visitor's bleachers. i walk below them and feel a sudden silence; the rain hasn't stopped, but the sound above seems to have been muted.

though the seats appear new from a distance, i can see from down here that this side of the stadium has just merely been repainted. luckily for me, they didn't bother to repaint anything below.

i should explain myself a bit, i believe. my name is unimportant and nowhere in this story will you find it. this story, in fact, isn't about me. i am in this story, i am in nearly every scene, but i assure you i am not its protagonist. you see, i can only tell truthful stories if i was there to witness or participate in that story. if i attempted to retell a story that i had merely heard, i would be certain to miss details. often the details would be mundane, but occasionally the details would be colossal. so, for that reason, i will only tell stories that i know.

this story is about rose tennen, the *lovely* rose tennen. the sun was always high in the sky when rose was around and the clouds crowded the sky in her absence. if there was ever a man who didn't believe in god, he would quickly confess after only seconds in her presence. she was pure enough to make angels

envious and the devil bow his head.

the spot i stand in, beneath these quiet bleachers, is the very spot her and i used to meet every night. we would sit here from the moment our parents went to sleep until the moment we had to rush back home. if i knew the groundskeeper wouldn't tear it down, i would have built a palace beneath these bleachers and spent eternity with her in my arms.

unfortunately, eternity is a myth, or at least that's what i thought. i later discovered that eternity is as real as the pain in the deepest corners of my soul, but it's not the same eternity we write about in novels. no, no, no. the eternity we write about is filled with love and hope and the ability to soak in it endlessly. however, real eternity is quite the opposite. it is still endless, but love and hope are nowhere to be found.

the day i discovered eternity was the day i lost both those things, love and hope. but i am getting far too ahead of myself. eternity is never where the story begins.

i examine the scratching's below the bleachers; many sharpies have run dry down here. i spot hearts with initials and wonder if their new partners have the same initials as their old.

i continue walking, but i promise you my walk is not aimless—it is only delayed. i know exactly where the drawing i desire is located. it has been 37 years since i last walked these steel canvases, but i still dream about them nightly. if my mind was to be emptied of all things, i promise you the location of this drawing would be etched so deeply into my psyche that even with a blank mind i could still tell you exactly where to find it.

i am merely delaying.

drawings of unicorns and bicycles and gang symbols and

artist tags enter and exit my peripheral, but still my mind can see only one thing: her.

finally, i summon the strength to change my path from delayed to intentional. i walk anxiously to the spot etched within me.

the drawing is of two interlocked cribs; i wish you could see the beautiful details rose put into them. her drawings never cease to amaze me.

i know, i know, you are wondering what this drawing means. allow me to explain:

rose and i were born only hours apart in the same hospital; this town only has one hospital, so there wasn't exactly a plethora of options. our parents have known each other for years. her father and my mother went to high school together, met their spouses when they went away for college, and all became close friends when they returned to this small town.

this being so, our parents were always together. they liked to drink. they called it social drinking, i called it excessive. either way, no matter how you categorize their drinking habits, the results are still the same. they would put our cribs facing one another so we could keep each other company as they drank themselves nearly to death in the next room.

our baby eyes would spend most nights staring blankly at one another. i remember my parents once telling me i would sit and watch her with mesmerized eyes; i guess i was in love even then.

i wish i could recollect to you what my thoughts were as i stared at her day in and day out, but unfortunately my memories of that age are nonexistent. i like to imagine they are similar to the thoughts i have today when i think of rose. pure

enchantment. pure wonder. pure thankfulness. pure love.

i suggested our first drawing be of two cribs, but it was her idea to interweave them. she said, “we should interweave them in the same way our souls have been weaved together, deeply and with such force that not even god could pull them apart.”

she couldn't help but to speak so poetically. i am fully convinced that her bones were the transcripts of the original psalms, her skin the cover of the first bible, she was held by the foot and fully submerged into the soul of god. she *was* poetry.

a few canvases over is another masterpiece by rose, a tree with the number three carved into its trunk.

like i said, rose and i were together a lot as kids. one afternoon, when we were three years old and our parents were inside drinking away another day, we entertained ourselves in the backyard. we played every game we could think of, mostly tag or hide-and-go-seek.

one turn, as i hid so deceitfully behind her father's bbq, i spotted a twig on the ground. i knelt down and picked it up. i decided i was better hidden on my knee, so i stayed in that position. i twirled the twig around and around.

i could hear rose nearing the bbq. then i looked down at the twig. my mind flashed back to a commercial i had seen recently. i remembered the man getting down on one knee, similar to the position i was currently in, pulling out a ring, shaped much like the twig in my hand, and asking a particular question.

rose came around the corner.

“rose, will you marry me?”

she yelled *yes!* and ran inside the house. i was unsure what the next steps were, the commercial had ended after the

woman said yes and then moved on to the next.

minutes later, rose came out in one of her fairy dresses. she looked beautiful. she always looked beautiful.

we stood beneath the tree in her backyard and married.
a few paces over is a third drawing: a swing set.

one day after class, when we were in the second grade, our parents were late picking us up. i can only imagine what they were off doing, instead. either way, i am glad they were late. in fact, i wish they had never picked us up from school that day or any day after that. i could have stood by that swing set with rose until our bones rotted into the dust they were always intended to be.

after waiting fifteen minutes out front rose and i grew impatient. rose decided we needed some entertainment, so she began to chase me. she chased me through the basketball courts, around the tetherball poles, and throughout the schoolyard.

i headed straight for the swing set. as i reached it, i felt her hand grab tightly onto my shirt. she had caught me.

i turned around, panting for air. even at the age of seven, she was the most beautiful person i had ever seen. she, without warning, leaned forward and kissed me.

to this day, i cannot walk past a swing set without thinking of her. or that kiss. or all the kisses that followed. but, again, i am getting ahead of myself.

the next drawing is a simple one, but the tragedy behind it is complex: a frown with the number 8 written below it.

there was a time when rose and i didn't see each other every day. in fact, there was a time when rose and i were countries apart. that time lasted eight years.

you see, her father and my mother knew each other since high school. it was only later that we, along with her mother and my father, learned exactly how well they had known each other. or how well they continued to know each other throughout the years. you could say that they, much like rose and i, were lovers.

their love began to fade when they went off to college. and it nearly faded away completely when rose's father met rose's mother and when my mother met my father. but the fading fire was sparked once more when they reunited. apparently, one night, after one of their many drinking rampages, her father and my mother were left alone in the same room.

that night started an affair that would last years. at the time, i would have never thought it possible, but after the damage had been done, when i looked back the signs had been so obvious. i remember my mother dragging me to rose's house at the oddest of hours for impromptu playdates. i distinctly remember the two of them disappearing for hours on end, but i was so infatuated with rose that i didn't care nor notice their absence.

this happened often. and the occurrences became more and more frequent. i didn't mind, though, it just meant more time with my love. i guess you could say that the affair was mutually beneficial.

until it wasn't.

one day, as rose and i played in the backyard, i heard a scream and a thud. rose's mother had come home early from work and her purse had dropped hard on the floor with her discovery.

seconds later, my mother walked out to the backyard, her

shirt only half buttoned, her hair a complete mess, her lipstick smeared onto her cheeks, and she pulled me by the arm. "let's go!" she yelled, as if what was happening was somehow my fault.

i turned back to rose and said, so innocently, "i'll see you tomorrow."

but i didn't. i didn't see her for another eight years. after the infidelity had been uncovered, rose's family moved halfway across the world.

i never understood why either of our parents remained married after such defilement to their relationships, but they did. kudos to them. i guess.

eight years later, rose's paternal grandmother became terminally ill and rose's father wanted to be home with her, so they moved back to this small town. i hate cancer as much as the next guy, but considering it brought rose back to me, i am perpetually thankful for cancer.

the disdain between rose's parents and mine, however, didn't cease in the slightest over those eight years. my parents sat me down, once the news had reached them that rose was back in town, and told me sternly i was not to associate with the tennens, especially rose.

as if they, *mere humans*, had the power to separate two souls that god had many years ago bound together.

we quickly decided that the bleachers i currently stand below would become our nightly meeting place.

as you can imagine, with two seventeen-year-olds madly in love meeting in the middle of the night, explorations were had and discoveries were made.

which brings us to our next drawing: a heart with the

initials rt + mine within it.

i know, i know, i know. earlier, as i stared at drawings foreign of my own experiences, i laughed at hearts similar to this, but it's because i walked the same campus as those other initials and i know for a fact that none of their loves ever reached the depths of ours.

this heart and our initials rested above the spot that rose and i—well, it is where our bodies merged and our souls officially became one.

the next drawing is where i met the true definition of eternity. it is where cribs untwined and collapsed.

this is the only drawing that was done by my own hand, and it is very obvious to the eye. it is a poorly drawn dress, or at least what was intended to be a dress, with a question mark beside it.

one night, i arrived a half hour earlier than our usual meeting time. the sky above was stirring, along with my anxiety. i began drawing the dress.

prom was coming up and i knew there was no better way of asking. this bleacher held all of who we were and i wanted those nights, that night and prom night, to be etched forever into the story of us.

i finished the drawing a few minutes before i expected her arrival. i waited eagerly.

an hour passed. rose was nowhere to be seen. another hour passed. then another. then another. nothing.

a few hours later, i awoke to the chirping of birds and the slow rise of the sun. rose never showed.

disheartened, i returned home. i dressed for school. i jumped on the bus. there was a strangeness in the air. the

chatter was nonexistent. the faces were all filled with gloom.

i found a seat next to a buddy of mine and asked why everyone seemed so down.

“it’s rose,” he said, “she’s dead.”

at that moment, the sun disappeared and clouds rolled over the town. my heart stopped. i couldn’t think.

rose.... is dead?

the clouds opened as tears rolled quickly down my cheeks. a storm had begun.

the school circulated with many rumors, stupid rumors that i won’t even dare repeat, as they could taint the truth of the story.

the truth.

police reported rose was driving near the high school around one in the morning. they were unsure of why she was on the road. but i knew. she was driving to see me.

a drunk driver hit her and fled the scene of the accident.

rose was discovered with a note in her hand that said, “remember us.” the police said it was nothing, but i knew it was everything. that note was the truth.

a few nights earlier, rose had come to the bleachers in a complete panic. i tried to calm her down, i told her it was nothing, she was only imagining it. i was so stupid. i could have saved her. but i didn’t.

she told me her mother had seen her sneaking out. she knew we were seeing each other.

i cannot be certain, as i said earlier any story i wasn’t there to witness could never be told with full truth, but a part of my soul was there that night and that part of my soul is telling me the following is true.

ryan david ginsberg

rose's mother caught her that night, but rose refused to go back into the house. she wanted to see me. she *needed* to see me.

she ran to her car and wrote a quick note: "remember us." she recognized the look in her mother's eyes and knew what was to come. she tried to reach me, but her mother reached her first. all she intended to do, or at least all i hope she intended to do, was stop her from reaching me. but instead, she ran her off the road and killed her own daughter.

the police never did consider me a reliable source. they told me, "your soul cannot witness." little do they know, your soul is the only true witness.

we say that eternity is forever spent with love and hope, but that is not eternity at all. time spent in love and hope whizzes by. there is never enough time when love is involved. eternity is the time you spend where both love and hope have no chance of ever existing. they will never make an appearance. they are gone.

these 37 years have been eternity. moments filled with pain and agony, both of which i cannot escape. though to us it is only 37 years, these moments last forever. they *are* eternity.

i have returned to this spot so i can be filled once more with love and with hope. i have come here to end eternity.

i pull the sharpie from my back pocket, pull off its cap, and create a new drawing. i draw her face, her smile, her twinkle. i include every detail i will never forget.

then underneath i write, "i remember."
and with that, the storm ceases.

this wandering

there are so many insecurities flowing through my veins with every step that i take in this wandering called life. i have not a clue of this path i find myself on or where i even got these shoes. but i do know that these shoes are quite filthy and i am quite thirsty and the sun sure is hot this afternoon.

i take a moment to sit in the shade and take a sip of this bottled water i happened to find behind a bush over yonder.

but i don't stop for too long. there are places i need to be and things i need to see and books i need to read and poetry i need to write. though nobody will ever read it. and nobody is even calling out my name. so i'm not quite sure why i even rushed out of the shade.

but i did.

i'm sure the shade didn't want me, anyhow.

now, what was i saying? and where was i going? and why are these shoes so goddamn filthy?

i'm sorry. am i bothering you with these words?

i'm sure that i am.

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