

pretending to try to be okay

ryan david ginsberg

to myself, we'll make it through. we always do.

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all rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever without the written permission of the author. basically, don't print, copy, scan, upload, distribute, etc. my poems or any line from my poems without my *written* consent. duh. we all know that's illegal. i would say message me on my social media, as i did in my previous book, but i'm not really about social media these days. so, i don't know, send a carrier pigeon or something. but then again, i'm not really about pigeons, either. i'd prefer you send me a carrier owl, like they do in harry potter. actually, i'd prefer to just live in the wizarding world of harry potter. that would be so cool. but, instead, i am stuck living in this boring, muggle world. writing a copyright page that nobody will even bother to read.

basically, back to the point of this page, just don't steal my shit. it's that simple. but, you know, if you want to borrow some of my shit, that's fine, all that i require in return is that you buy me a snow owl and train it to send mail. i would consider that a fair trade. and since i have written it and printed it, i think that makes it a legally binding thing. right? i don't know, i'm no lawyer.

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this is the first edition of *i am pretending to try to be okay*.

okay, now stop reading this dumb copyright page and start reading my poems instead. or, you know, start training my snow owl. either activity will suffice.

*it's the night before the mixtape drops
and a bunch of dark thoughts fall in my head
what if it's not everything i want it to be
what if it sounds real good to me
but it doesn't sound good to him or her or anyone*

- jon bellion.

pretending to try to be okay

an introduction.

these past few months have been very much like the many, many months that preceded them. i woke, i wrote, i worked, i ate, i wrote some more, i kissed my girlfriend, i told her that i loved her, i slept, i repeated. from the outside, they were all just another day. then just another week. then just another month. then just another few months.

but they weren't just another few months to me.

externally, yes, i was fine.

but, eternally, i was fighting a war against myself and the many, many other selves that reside inside the self that represents the totalities of the many, many selves that are me.

what i am trying to say, in far too many words, is these past few months have been extremely difficult. not for reasons love heartbreak or death, but rather for reasons that cannot fully be explained or understood or truly believed unless you lived inside my head. i wish i could bring you in, show you around, introduce you to the demons that far too often control my every move, but the best that i can do is collect the many words that spill out and trap them in a book.

again.

i have been pretending to be okay for so long. well, that's not entirely true. you see, my poems have been sad all along. but i've been trying to be okay. or maybe not. you see, i fear if i am okay then i will no longer have any poems to write. and i really, desperately, more desperately than you will likely be able to understand, need to write poems. so, instead, i've only been pretending to try to be okay.

hence, the title of this book.

for me, i see these books—the one you are now holding in your hands and *for souls like mine*, which i (self-)published last may—as mixtapes. they were both written in short periods of time. they were both (haphazardly) edited by myself. the covers were both designed by myself—though i must admit, i lazily used a royalty-free, pre-made format for the front cover of *for souls like mine*; which, like most decisions i have made throughout my life, i now thoroughly regret. the pages were formatted by myself. the copyright was (poorly) written by myself. and this humble brag, where i attempt to impress you by casually telling you that i did all of this by myself, was written by myself. and...you get the point:

these books are far from professional.

yet, i am extremely proud of what i have done with them. every word—even the ones that are crippled by obvious and egregious typos, and those whose meanings are lost in a mess of poorly attempted grammar—is a fragment of my soul, severed for you to peruse and to do with as you choose. maybe that's what makes these books so honest, the typos, the mistakes, the flaws, because they were written by an extremely flawed man.

or boy.

or whatever else you prefer to categorize me as, i no longer mind.

in this book, like the last, i will be pouring out my soul for you—whoever you are; *hello!* but i find the gesture odd, my vulnerability, because it is not an adjective that can be used to describe me in my regular life. you know, the life that we are all forced to live. inside that physical world. the very physical world that is quickly falling apart. in that life—the one filled with far too many screens and far too many lonely nights and

far too many judgmental eyes and far too many wars and far too many corrupt politicians and far too many systemic sins and far too many...—i am extremely closed off. i am the guy who can get anybody to open up, to tell their deepest secrets, to reveal the wars that are waged inside their minds, yet i reveal nothing.

nothing, nothing, nothing.

unless it is through poetry. unless it is through words that i have written, then edited, then thrown into the trash, then written again.

i do not consider myself a great poet. i don't even consider myself a good poet. adequate? maybe. *maybe*. i do not expect my poetry to change your life. i do not expect it to change mine. i only expect it to exist and in that existence to reveal things about myself that i am far too cowardly to admit in that physical world crippled by sins.

as my poetry will, undoubtedly, be crippled by typos.

i could sit here and act like those typos are deliberate. like those typos exist with the intention of mirroring the world that we live in. like those typos exist with the intention of bringing attention to the fact that the words were written by flawed hands. in my previous book, *for souls like mine*, i really tried to justify the typos. but, in reality, the typos only exist in these books because i am extremely bad at grammar and spelling and proofreading and all other things that writers should probably be good at. and i am far too broke to pay for a professional to edit my work.

but i have already dedicated enough time to the typos. they are unimportant. let's speak about more important things:

me.

me, me, me.

the man, boy, whatever who is so egotistical that he feels the need to self-publish his own work. the man, boy, whatever who is so egotistical that he truly believes his words deserve to sit on bookshelves all around the world. the man, boy, whatever who is so egotistical that he felt the need to write a second book of poetry just to talk about how sad he is inside.

me, me, me.

the man, boy, whatever who hates himself so much that he often thinks about killing himself. the man, boy, whatever who has wasted years and years and years of his life lying in bed, numbing himself with *how i met your mother* reruns, plotting all the different ways he could do it. the man, boy, whatever who once tried one of his plans on the freeway somewhere in orange county, california. he just closed his eyes and loosened his grip on the wheel and waited for sweet, sweet relief. but that sweet, sweet relief never came.

it never does.

the suicidal thoughts come back every so often. new plots and new schemes and new ideas and new dreams often come with them. they tie themselves to the man, boy, whatever and follow him everywhere he goes. he lies in bed with the woman that he loves, and he thinks about killing himself. he sits around the dinner table with his mother, father, and two sisters, and he thinks about killing himself. he writes an introduction to a book called *pretending to try to be okay*, and he thinks about killing himself.

me, me, me.

but the man, boy, whatever is not always suicidal. sometimes he is happy. sometimes he walks outside, feels the sunshine on his skin, and smiles. sometimes he kisses his

girlfriend with passion. sometimes he laughs without forcing it to be. sometimes life is good.

good, good, good.

then his mind snaps. his chemicals go haywire. his heart loses control. his soul is overrun with anxious thoughts and suicidal schemes.

his smile doesn't disappear, though. nor does his laugh. he is a master at covering things up. at pretending to be okay.

at pretending to try to be okay.

except for in his poetry.

he is incapable of lying in his poetry.

that is why he writes it.

to force himself to be honest.

to look within and see what is truly going on.

me, me, me.

even in my honesty, i am deflecting. writing about myself in the third person. acting like i am not him. like i am, somehow, on the outside looking in. while, in reality, i am on the inside. i *am* the inside.

i am the man, boy, whatever.

these poems are pieces of me.

this book you are holding is me in the only physical form that i prefer.

poetry.

am i rambling?

maybe.

but that's what i get to do when i self-publish my own book. there is no editor telling me to simmer down. there is no publisher telling me i am far too off-track. there is no agent telling me to keep to the brand. there is no marketer to tell me

that studies show people are not interested in reading the mad ramblings of an unknown, self-declared poet.

there is only me and the computer i am typing on and the voices in my head saying, “go on, go on, go on.”

and i go on.

it is exhausting. being me. or trying to be whatever me is supposed to be. it feels like this body is shared by many, many, many unnamed personalities. can you imagine trying to make a decision with so many voices tossing in their unwanted opinions? one day, i want to be this. so i be this. the next day i want to be that. so i be that. the next day i want to be something else. so i be something else.

can you imagine trying to love a person like that?

can you imagine?

try.

try to imagine.

you fall in love with a man, boy, whatever who says he is this. you love this. you love this so much. but then he decides he wants to be that. you don't love that so much. but you love him. so you learn to love that. it takes work, but you do it. then, right when you are beginning to love that, he decides he wants to be something else.

can you imagine trying to love a person like that?

can you imagine?

yet i continuously ask people to do it.

why?

because:

me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me.

and me goes on.

although the writings in this book can easily be misinterpreted as the whining of an insane man, boy,

whatever, it is not my intention to whine. there are many different intentions that i have for writing this book:

one, to explore my mind through poetry.

two, to share the discoveries of my explorations with the fools foolish enough to spend money on such foolish discoveries.

three, to reveal to those who may find similar discoveries inside their own minds that they are not alone. that there are, in fact, others like them. like me.

four, to show my mother and father that i really am trying to be a “successful” writer and i am not (only) a lazy kid who refuses to move out of his parent’s house because he is too weak to work a cubicle job that would provide him with a nice salary and 401(k) and health insurance.

five, i am a firm believer that the best way to beat your demons is to first admit that you have demons, then to take those demons and shine the light on them as brightly as you can—and i think the brightest way to shine a light on them is to put them into a book for the whole world, if they so choose, to see—and scream “you do not define me!”

six, (not really all that) deep down, i have this desire to be a poet that is spoken about in coffee shops and bookstores and libraries and wherever else hipsters—i mean scholars—hang out in their free time.

seven, i have multiple manuscripts gathering dust on my hard drive, and i am (not-so-)secretly hoping that an agent or publisher or whoever else it is that makes books will happen to somehow get trapped in a locked room with only this one (self-published) book and that that publisher/agent/whoever will then read this book and say, “i guess i can try to publish those dusty manuscripts.”

eight, i am terrified of death—which is really quite ironic, coming from a man/boy/whatever who often lusts for death—and i believe there is immortality in written word.

nine, i egotistically enjoy the high of seeing my name on a “real” book. and i desperately need another hit.

ten, i believe there is nothing this world needs more at this moment than poetry. let us, together, flood the streets.

and i go on.

will this ever end?

i don't know.

maybe.

eventually.

but not yet.

you will find in my writing tiny hints of attempted comedy. i do this because sincerity terrifies the living hell out of me—and all that lives inside of me is hell, so if i allowed myself to be too sincere then i run the risk of scaring the entirety of myself away.

you see? that was an example of attempted comedy.

here is another example, it comes from a poem that i decided not to include in this book (though i guess i am now deciding to include it):

*every time i get anxious i try to fight it off with a joke
that's why i'm constantly knocking on doors
in the middle of every conversation*

i would love to promise you that the poetry that did make it into this book is far better than the prior poem. but that may be a lie.

remember, i said i am only (at best) an adequate poet.

this attempted comedy is often so bad that it requires extensive explanation just for you to say, “oh, i see what you were *attempting* to do there.”

but i will not provide you with the required explanations.

let’s get back to the point:

i am terrified of how vulnerable i allow myself to be in my writing. it scares, like i said, the living hell out of me. it feels like i am walking into a sold-out auditorium and stripping all of my clothes and standing on stage for the entire audience to see.

so, to relieve some of the nerves, i sprinkle in some attempted comedy. my way of trying to say:

i really don’t care.

but i do care.

i do, i do, i do.

this book is not just random words.

it is my soul.

i have said it before and i will say it again.

this book is my soul.

i have said it before and i will say it...

(attempted comedy.)

your judgment over the words inside this book hurts me infinitely more than your judgment over my skin or my possessions or my accolades ever could.

these words are as me as me can ever be.

typos and all.

and i go on.

i’m almost done.

i promise.

let’s get back to the title of this book. of this collection.

pretending to try to be okay.

i want to be okay, i really do. but i have a hesitation in me. a hesitation that i can't seem to shake. you see, i have been broken for so long that i am afraid i will be unable to recognize myself if i am no longer broken. happiness, an emotion i experience every so often, feels so foreign to me that i often reject it by blasting a playlist aptly titled *sad*.

maybe it's because the myth "all good artists are tortured souls" has been so spoon-fed to me that i subconsciously believe it to be true. maybe that's why i torture my own soul. for art's sake.

everything i do is for art's sake.

maybe that's why i cut my veins open and spill my blood onto the page for your judgmental eyes to feast on.

or maybe i am unfixable.

or maybe there is no such thing as broken. maybe there are just billions of souls trapped on this thing called earth and these souls have no choice but to suck it all up as they are forced to endure this thing called life.

but they will be rewarded in the end.

with death.

and i sit here, passing the time by writing and self-publishing a collection of poems, patiently waiting for my reward.

shall i go on?

no.

i think this shall suffice.

i made you cry again tonight.

it seems to be happening more and more, lately.

i don't mean to make you cry, but i always seem to find a way.

i know you worry about me, i worry about me, too; and i know you are afraid of the things that i can do, i am terrified, too.

i hate these hands and this mind and the thoughts and plans and schemes that travel between them both.

i know they don't mean to harm me, it's just sometimes the light in my heart is too dark for them to know where they are going, you know?

this breath in my lungs is really heavy, the heartbeats are painful against my ribs, and sometimes this earth doesn't quite feel like home to me.

they only want me to be happy, as do you, as do i, and i promise i am trying to be okay.

or i am trying to try, pretending to try, i don't know.

my mind is a scary place to be and i'm so sorry i ever introduced you to all these dark roads.

i am sorry that i shook your hand with this hand of mine that wants so badly to wrap itself so tightly around my neck, wrap its fingers around a gun, a rope, a bottle, i don't know.

i try not to listen as it schemes with my mind.

i only try to look at you, but you are covered in tears and my mind and hands are still scheming and you are so afraid.

me, too.

me, too.

i am not writing this book for you.

i am writing it for me.

i am writing it because i am fucking terrified that if i don't
write this book then i will do something i can never
take back.

i have demons.

they swim beneath my skin and, though i attempt to fight
them off, too often i am weak.

so i am writing, instead.

words that may be last, though i pray that they are not.

war is such a terrible thing.

it can break you in ways almost impossible to see with the
naked eye.

but i can feel it inside.

i am breaking.

so, now i am writing.

i am pretending to be okay, trying to be okay, pretending
to try to be okay, whatever you want to call it, but i
am not fucking okay.

i am not, i am not, i am not, i am not, i am not writing this
book for you.

i am writing it for me.

sometimes my mind is blank.
an empty void
filled only with silence.
and other times my mind is chaotic.
a stormy night
filled with screams that never cease.
i search desperately for a place in the middle.
a place where my thoughts have enough room to grow and
 enough water to nourish them without drowning them out.
but all i can find are droughts and stormy nights.
silence and loud screams.
words that mean nothing.
and words that are far too loud.
i want to find some middle ground.
some sanity.
some happiness to sprinkle upon this miserable life that i can't
 seem to evade.
but the nights are too dark and the days are too hot and my
 legs are too weak and there are a million more excuses for
 why i continue to delay my journey to a better place.
fear.
i wonder why i fear happiness.
why i fear normality.
why i fear a calm heart with a smile across my face.
why i fear...
but i can't stop.
i am crippled by it.

when i was 8 years old i thought the world ended with my
city limits.

when i was 8 years old i thought i could reach out and
touch the stars.

when i was 8 years old i thought my mother was god.

when i was 8 years old i thought my father was invincible.

when i was 8 years old i thought my dreams were
glimpses into the future.

when i was 8 years old i thought everyone within view
was my friend.

when i was 8 years old i thought rainbows were made
from magic.

when i was 8 years old i thought kindness was my
superpower.

when i was 8 years old i thought every picture i drew on
my bedroom wall was majestic.

when i was 8 years old i thought my dogs understood my
every word.

when i was 8 years old i thought i was in love, many
times, with many different young girls whose hands
just happened to be covered in cooties.

when i was 8 years old i thought that dime i found on the
floor that one afternoon was worth a fortune.

when i was 8 years old i thought ice cream was an
inalienable right, though i didn't know what the word
inalienable was at the time.

when i was 8 years old i thought my teacher was the
smartest person on the planet.

when i was 8 years old i thought that bruise on my knee
would be the death of me.

when i was 8 years old i thought dinosaurs still existed,
somewhere, and that one day my parents would take
me to that somewhere and i would be able to pet
them and maybe even ride them and maybe, if i was
really, really good, i'd be able to take one home and
introduce it to my dogs.

when i was 8 years old i thought every smile was real and
every promise was unbreakable.

but now i am 25 years old and i no longer waste my time
with such silly thoughts.

billboards pass through my peripheral:

eat this,
drink that.
do this,
be that.

leaking into my subconscious

until i no longer know

who is in control—

me

or some random billboards

on the side of the street.

but i am hungry

and i know for a fact

that carls jr.

is having one hell of a deal.

so i exit the freeway

and make a right.

pretending to try to be okay

i'm building the railroad,
hoping that one day the people will ride.

i'm watering the dirt,
hoping that one day the flower will rise.

i'm buying journal after journal,
hoping that one day my pen will finally write.

i'm chasing the rainbow,
hoping that my mother was right.

i build expectations higher than any reality could ever live up to. i build them into the stars and wonder why these earthly things can never reach them. i want my dreams to be much more than just dreams, i want my dreams to have dreams and those dreams to have dreams and i want my reality to exceed each and every one of those dream's dream's dreams.

i dream about my arms extending, not only beyond the atmosphere of earth, but outside of the milky way galaxy. but my arms can only reach a couple of feet and my body is immediately filled with disappointment and grief.

maybe mountains should be enough. or simply these rolling hills. but, no. i want a universe in the palm of my hands. and then i curse those very palms for not being able to hold it all.

expectations.

one day, they will be the death of me. but don't get me started on what i expect in my death. because i'm sure heaven will never be enough.

i want more. i demand more. i *need* more!

but all i have are rolling hills and palms that are far too small and dreams that continue to dream of better dreams that my short arms can never reach.

i am choking.
on thoughts
and regrets
and deaths
that have not yet occurred.
i see dreams being crushed,
families being lost,
futures remaining unfulfilled.
a paper cut becomes a severed leg
and a sandwich with mustard,
though i specifically asked for no *fucking* mustard,
hits my week like a hurricane.
i am dramatic,
neurotic,
anxious,
fearful,
and regretful for decisions
i have yet to even make.
sometimes i just need to stop
and take a deep breath,
but my lungs don't seem to work
and this air is far too thin
and i can't breathe.
i am choking.

pretending to try to be okay

my mind is like a body of water—
sometimes it is a quiet pond,
but today it is a raging river
and the waterfall
is quickly approaching.

it is far too easy to take this bullshit thing called life too seriously. but here's the thing: a life not laughed at is a life not lived. you look stupid, you make bad decisions, there are scars that taint your otherwise perfect skin, nights lost to a racing mind filled with regret. you didn't kiss her, but you should have. you didn't love him, instead, you chose to neglect him. you gave up on your dreams far too easily, choosing instead to listen to the whisperings of society, locking yourself inside a secure little cubicle.

it's fine. laugh it off. life is not that serious.

billions of years passed before you were ever even conceived. and billions of years will pass after your death.

so laugh it off.

you look stupid, it's true, but one day that stupid look of yours will be forgotten forever. you make bad decisions, but one day you will be dead and billions of years will pass and your bad decisions will be hidden beneath a billion more bad decisions. there are scars on your skin, but one day that skin will be buried six feet beneath the earth, then eventually that skin will fade along with the earth it is buried beneath. so why are you wasting your time with so many regrets? you didn't kiss her, you wish that you did, but you didn't, and that's okay because there are still so many women out there waiting for you to kiss them. you didn't love him, you should have, but, instead, you chose to neglect him, luckily for you there are still billions of other men left in the world to love. you gave up on your dreams, locked yourself

inside a secure little cubicle, but there is still time,
tell your boss to fuck off, along with the society that
whispered all of those lies in your ear, and pursue
that dream you so nearly forgot about.

billions of years passed before you were ever even
conceived. and billions of years will pass after your
death.

but for now, the clock overhead is only ticking by the
second.

there is plenty of time to make a change.

so laugh it off.

life is not that serious.

am i wrong for wanting to run away? am i wrong for
daydreaming about cabins so deep in the woods that
god himself couldn't even find me? am i wrong for
wanting to leave everything and everyone behind?
am i wrong for wanting to take all these books off my
shelf—some written by me, others written by men
and women long, long, long dead—and run and never
look back?

my mother tells me i am far too young to think the way
that i do.

“life is not pointless, there is so very much to be joyous
about, my son,” she says, but tears keep running
down my cheeks, nonetheless.

am i wrong for wanting to shout at her? am i wrong for
wanting to tell her to give up on me already? am i
wrong for wanting her to forget that i exist? am i
wrong for wanting her to hate me? am i wrong for
thinking everything would be easier if i just
disappeared?

my girlfriend tells me she is afraid.

“i don't know what to do when you get like this,” she says
to me as her eyes fill with fear and my eyes fill with
indifference.

am i wrong for wanting to tell her that she can't save me?
am i wrong for wanting to bring her with me? am i
wrong for being too afraid to let her go? am i wrong
for not wanting to walk down this road all alone? am
i wrong for wanting to tie her up with guilt and pack
her bags full of obligations and drag her to the cabin
not even god could find?

am i wrong?

when i was young, i knew that i was special.
i knew i was destined for amazing things.
i knew i was bound to change the world.
i knew i was placed on this earth for a reason.
i just *knew* it.
but so much of what i knew in my youth
turned out not to be true.
like santa claus.
like fairy tales.
like the nerd gets the girl.
like i am special.

i find myself on this path
with no idea where it leads
i take a pen to my veins
and let them bleed
all these words
that nobody even bothers to read
or comprehend
i send my soul
into the world
through metaphors
that even i don't understand
i'm just a man
and these veins
sure love to bleed
and my feet
sure love to wander this path
wherever it leads.

i grow my hair long, not because i like the way it looks,
but because weeds always seem to grow in
abandoned gardens.

you will not find roses here in my mind, only thorns on
withering bushes and insecurities on overwatered
thoughts.

you took all the hope away from me, along with all the
seeds, cut the roots to all my dreams then sat and
watched them bleed.

and me, you left shattered and afraid in a garden that was
never meant to be traveled alone.

the path here is so wide, it was made for two, but my
body walks it on its own and my hand is so cold as it
rests empty by my side.

do you ever think of me or this garden or the roses that
used to be?

or what about this path we used to walk or this tree we
used to kiss beneath or do you ever just sit and think
of me?

i grow my hair long, not because i like the way it looks,
but because it reminds me of the garden we once had
together—

the one now consumed by weeds and long hair and dead
dreams.

i am right here, waiting for you to look up,
but you are scrolling on that tiny screen in your hand and
my cheeks are getting tired from the plastered smile
on face that is waiting so eagerly for you to look up
and discover it.

it's for you.

this smile and this dinner that took over two hours to
prepare and this glass of wine that i poured, just look
up, we're all waiting.

what is so important on that screen?

i look down and see that our dinner is growing cold and
my hands are growing old and the wine might just be
exactly what i need to numb this pain in my cheeks.

i pick up the glass and take a sip, which turns into a chug.
i feel the wine dripping down my cheek, onto my neck,
onto the shirt that i wore just for you.

you say i don't dress up enough, but tonight i did, because
i wanted to be fancy, for you,
but you haven't even looked up to see my shirt and it
already has a stain on it.

i pick up the fork, the knife, and begin to eat the now cold
dinner,
hoping you will join me soon enough.

then he looked at me and said,
"son, there are three versions of the past.
there is what you remember:
the way her hair flowed through the wind,
the sensation of her fingers sliding into your own,
the ecstasy of her lips and her hips.
then there is her recollection:
the way you held her for a second too short,
the way your eyes wandered to flesh that wasn't hers,
the way your lips smiled yet your eyes remained cold.
then there is the truth:
that two souls connected and intertwined,
lit fires and danced around with limited time,
but eventually their gravitational pull began to fade.
so the two souls disconnected
and became what they were always destined to be,
apart."

ryan david ginsberg

you and i are just a happy ending that floated amiss

i have been told that i say sorry too often.
i'm sorry,
it is something i cannot control or contain or prevent.
it is caused by a lifetime of training.
you see,
i *am* sorry.
constantly.
it is subconscious.
something that has been ingrained
from all of their words
and their looks
and their shoves into the dirt.
i'm sorry.
if i didn't have to be,
i wouldn't be,
but i am forced to be.
every night i lie down to sleep
and hope it will be the final time,
the final night,
the final light.
but the morning always comes.
and i am forced to be, once more.
so for that, i am sorry.
truly.

dear america, i refuse to stand back. i refuse to put my hand over my chest and pretend that everything is all right. we are broken. we are fragmented to the bone. our veins are severed and there is blood pouring through the streets of washington, dc. our youth is dying with uniforms over their skin with the american flag stitched into the linen. and for what? for another sip of oil? for another grasp at power? for another lustful politician? when will we learn that peace will never be found with a gun in our hand?

the american dream is just another piece of propaganda. how many men do you pass with raggedy clothes over their dirtied skin holding signs begging for just a single bite of food? men who once wore uniforms with the american flag stitched into the linen. but they didn't die like the rest of our youth. it's fine, said america, they'll die cold and hungry in the streets. thank you for your service, but you're free to go. *where?* it isn't our concern.

it is 3 am and a single mother has just made it home. her children tucked themselves into bed again. she walks over to their bedroom, cracks the door open, and just listens to their gentle breath. she wants to hold them in the sunlight but there is rent due to a landlord who only sees her as a paycheck, there are taxes to pay to a government who only sees her as a vessel to provide more soldiers for more wars for more oil, there are mouths to feed on children who hardly remember what she looks like. she gets a couple hours of sleep then rises again at 6 am and returns to work. she leaves breakfast and lunch on the counter for her kids who are still snoring as she creeps out the door. she cries on the bus that takes two hours to get her to work.

this morning at school, children go through yet another active shooter drill, just in case an untreated man runs through their halls and attempts to end their lives with bullets he bought down the street. a woman is told maybe she shouldn't have worn such provocative clothing. a black man is shoved to the ground by a police officer who swore to protect him. a neighborhood crumbles with gunshots. another is overcome with smoke from a crack pipe. pain pills are used for coping. alcohol is used for forgetting. americans walk down the street high as a fucking kite, passing old soldiers with dirty clothes and begging signs, and you have the nerve to demand that i put my hand over my heart and thank a flag that is covered in blood?

i refuse.

oh america, america,
you will not take this *here* gun from me!
you will take my child away in a body bag
before you get this gun from me.
oh america, are you listening?
paint the streets red with blood,
that is fine,
but this *here* gun is mine.
ain't nobody robbin' from me,
no siree,
there is a gun on this *here* property!
guns don't kill people,
people kill people,
and i will kill you with my gun
if you don't get off my goddamn property!
you see,
this gun is my love,
and my child will be in a body bag
before you get this *here* gun from me.
yessiree.

pretending to try to be okay

divide and conquer,
that's all that they want.
that's why i lock arms
with every one of my
sisters and brothers.
it doesn't matter
which side of the aisle we're on.
we're all in the same chamber,
under the same flag,
stuck on the same land—
earth.
so let's lock arms
and stand together.

fuck politicians,
they serve no one but themselves.
waving flags that mean nothing,
declaring ideals they don't even believe in themselves,
running for offices that only exist in our minds,
feeling so powerful and mighty,
pretending to do it all for us.
they're not.
they're only serving themselves.

grab my hand,
i don't care who you voted for in the last election.
it's fine,
we all fucked up,
we all bought into their lies.
we all believed that this country was more than it really is—
a piece of land with invisible borders,
a figment of our imagination,
some pieces of paper with signatures that mean nothing.
with a white house filled with criminals,
breaking laws that only exist if we protect them,
committing sins only punishable by a god that doesn't exist.
grab my hand,
our skin is the only thing that is real.
not countries,
not borders,
not politicians,
not democracies,
not electoral colleges,
not elections.
grab my hand.
we'll be okay,
we'll be okay,
we'll be okay.

ryan david ginsberg

my biggest fear isn't dying,
it's being forgotten.

pretending to try to be okay

you are like smoke in my lungs—
 slowly killing me,
but i'm addicted to the high.

ryan david ginsberg

they call my dreams
insanity,
i call their societies
prison.

there are millions of thoughts racing through this mind of mine. chaotic, to say the least. but i know everything will be fine once the right words take root and grow beyond the chaos.

here's the thing: i see way beyond two or three or four dimensions. i see futures on the horizon, millions and trillions and infinite paths, all of which evolve with my every thought and every action and every word that i let slip off my tongue. the evolutions in their singularities are minuscule, but i am forcing dozens of evolutions by the second and the horizons, day by day, are changing quite noticeably.

there is so much power in this mind of mine. look past the chaos and you will find infinite futures changing. and everything is taking place one thought at a time. all i need are the right words to take root.

and so goes life for you. your mind may be chaotic and you may want to silence it. don't. just be patient. the right words will take root. and you, too, will see futures evolving beyond it all.

i look at you and want to smile, but i can't smile, baby,
because smiles are so hard to find these days, even around
you.

i know you think that you're too blame, i can see it in your
eyes, but it isn't true, you didn't cause this, i did, but my
lips refuse to move, and you still blame yourself.

i'm sorry.

i want to smile, i do, but i can't seem to find a smile to give to
you.

you see, my mind is broken, or maybe it's my heart, or maybe
it's my spirit, or maybe my wires are straight and this is
just how i was always meant to be.

baby, stop crying, i'm fine, i'm fine, i'm fine, i'm fine, i'm
fine, i'm fine, i'm fine, or one day i will be.

you ask me how it feels inside of my mind, inside of my skin,
inside of my heart, and i wish i could describe it for you,
but i can't, and all i want to do is lie in bed and try to
sleep this entire fucking life away.

i'm sorry.

i want to smile, look at me darling, look at me, i want to smile,
you make me so happy, i promise, or at least you make
me as happy as a sad boy like me can be.

look at this, feel my chest, you feel that heart, it's still beating
because of you, i'm still breathing because of you.

don't cry, i didn't mean to make you sad again, i wish i could
stop these thoughts, but i can't, all i can do is fight them,
and i am so much stronger with you here by my side.

i want to smile, i do, i do, but smiles are so hard to find these
days, even around you—the only thing that gives me a
reason to smile, at all.

pretending to try to be okay

please don't go,
it's so lonely in this head of me.

ryan david ginsberg

i miss the days
when my self worth
wasn't dependent on likes
or follows
or views on my story.
but those days are gone
and i need a refill.

i wake up and the first thing i do is scroll through my phone
for a couple of minutes,
by my side is a beautiful woman, but i don't even consider
rolling over to tell her good morning.
you see, i posted a picture yesterday and i just need to see how
many likes it got overnight.
and i must know who watched my story and who liked my
status and who retweeted my tweets.
“good morning,” she says, but i am mid-scroll, so i just grunt a
little something that is meant to say, “i hear you, but i
have scrolling to do and likes to receive and retweets to
smile about.”
she rubs her hand across my chest, her fingers are so cold, the
ac is blasting, and my fingers are still busy collecting all
the likes.
she kisses my cheek,
i smile,
i've received so many likes—
lucky me, lucky me.

some days, i look up from my phone
and realize it is not day, at all.
instead, it is night.
you see, at some point,
amidst my mindless scrolling,
the sun set
and the moon rose
and the stars crept out
and life sure did fly by
completely un-seized
by me.

be wary of the lives you see being lived online.

social media is nothing more than theatre, often you cannot see the things taking place behind the curtains. or between the scenes. or in rehearsals. there is so much more going on than what you see on that stage. more to life than the moments touched by the spotlight.

there are bloopers and tears and forgotten lines and rehearsals until 3 am because actors couldn't seem to get their scenes just right.

and social media is just a stage where hours and hours of struggle is never seen. but the struggles still exist.

be wary.

ryan david ginsberg

how am i supposed to hold my girlfriend at night,
whisper i love you,
while i'm dying inside?

pretending to try to be okay

how am i supposed to look my mother in the eye
and smile
with thoughts of suicide on my mind?

i can't please you, can i?

i cut off my arms and you want my legs.

i give you my heart and you want my soul.

what am i supposed to do?

you are pulling me and yanking me and it is tearing me apart.

i can't give you diamond rings or luxury bags or new breasts,
all i can give you are these shitty words, they're all that i have.

so tell me, what the fuck am i supposed to do?

i am now arm-less and leg-less and heart-less and soul-less
and yet you want more.

you want diamond rings and luxury bags and new breasts,
but all i can give you is this book, instead.

i can't please you, can i?

i wish i could describe
the look in their eyes
when i tell them
how i'm feeling inside.
you see,
my demon's arms extend
way beyond only my heart
and mind
and soul.
the demons wrap themselves
tightly around my words
and latch onto whoever i whisper those words to.
i wish i could ensure my mother
that i am stronger
than these thoughts of mine,
stronger than these demons,
stronger than their desires,
and stronger than this noose around my neck,
but i can't.
so, instead, i pretend to be okay.
i put a smile on my face
and fight the demons all alone.

i should kill myself,
it would make everything easier.
my mother would no longer need to worry,
my father would no longer need to worry,
my girlfriend would no longer need to worry,
i'd no longer need to worry about letting them all down,
and you'd no longer need to worry about reading all these
angsty fucking words from another wannabe, self-
declared poet.

pretending to try to be okay

you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
you let me go
and i'm still spinning
out of control.

ryan david ginsberg

every time i think of suicide, i write another poem, instead

what the hell am i thinking? putting all these suicidal thoughts
into a book, i should keep them inside where they belong.
nobody wants to know how i really feel. just tell them
what they want to hear.

“hey, ryan!”

“oh, hey, friend!”

“how are you are?”

i’m dying inside. i want to take my own life. i’m spinning out
of control. i need to be held. no. i need to be alone. no. i
need some fucking help. no. no. no. no. no. no. no. no. no!

“i’m fine, i’m fine, everything is just fine.”

i smile and i nod along to the bullshit i’m not even listening to.
instead, i am writing suicidal notes in my mind.

waiting to get home, so i can try to turn those notes into
another shitty poem.

i am at a crossroads.
follow my dreams
or give in to the demands of society?
job security, health insurance, pto, 401(k),
or moneyless writing for one?
a home to call my own
or a bedroom filled with unread manuscripts?
a fancy dinner for my girlfriend
or another homemade meal enjoyed with a side of tension?
a vacation on a sandy beach
or another night alone with a pen in my hand?
a family well fed
or a soul not neglected?
the road seems clear to everyone
but me.

pretending to try to be okay

i want to make you happy,
i want to make you proud,
i want to ease your stress,
 but momma,
 can't you see?
 i must write.
i must, i must, i must, i must, i must.
i don't know anything else.

ryan david ginsberg

i am being tugged—
one arm by society,
another arm by my heart.
and they are slowly
tearing me apart.

there is no handbook for life
no tour guide
no street signs
only a heart and a mind and a society constantly at war
only dreams being hushed by bills that keep coming every
month, even though i politely asked them to stop
only contradicting advice from people who only think that
they know me, but they can't hear my racing mind, they
only see me as i wander through another day high as fuck
on another pot of caffeine
only suits hanging in windows, with briefcases to match,
whispering for me to join their side of life
only cubicles choking me out
only mother's disappointed eyes
only friends telling me to grow up
only strangers telling me to give up
only landlords reminding me that i'm three months behind rent
only dreams fading away
only society forcing us all down the same fucking road
but there is no handbook for life

too often we are warned
about the risks
of pursuing our dreams.
but just imagine the risks
of ignoring our hearts.
we have only one life—
one life, one life, one life—
and i'd rather spend mine
hungrily chasing dreams
through gutters in the street
than in a luxurious home
burning with regret.

one life, one life, one life—
that's all that we are given.
just one,
and what do i do with mine?
complain,
alone,
to a notebook in my childhood home.
scheme,
in my mind,
the many ways to make it stop.
dream,
at night,
that even this one life was never forced upon me.
one life, one life, one life—
and what do i do with it?

can you see it?
the dissatisfaction
in the smile
of the man
over there on the bench.
the one in the suit.
his words declare
that he is fine,
but i see pain
behind his eyes
that no smile
can ever hide.
can you see it?
the wrinkles in her forehead
that make her seem
two decades wiser
than she truly is.
she got them from the kids
that she loved far too hard.
the ones who didn't thank her even once.
the ones who constantly forget to call back.
the ones too busy for christmas dinner
four years in a row.
can you see it?
the façade that young kid is putting on,
building friendships on top of lies.
he knows that when the truth finally comes out
those friendships will topple,
so he pulls the mask down tighter.
tighter, tighter, tighter!
until the mask suffocates the kid

beneath the weight
of so many false friendships.
can you see it?
the way life beats on all of us,
the way it knocks us down,
the way it is so fucking relentless,
the way we have no choice
but to smile through it all
and say,
i'm okay,
i'm okay,
i'm okay.
can you see it?

instead of chasing consistency and wealth and insurance,
i chased fool's gold and silly dreams and rom-com movie plot
lines.

i gave my heart the rein,
instead of my brain,
and now it has grown tired
and my chest is in pain
and don't even get me started on these fucking lungs.

i wanted to beat society,
no, no, no!

you can't get me down, society

oh, no, no, no!

throughout my fight, i used this body for things it was never
built to do.

it was built to sit in cubicles,
but instead, i used it to chase rainbows.

it was built to follow orders,
but instead, i used it to climb fences.

it was built to bow and pray and salute,
but instead, i used it to tear down establishments.

but in the end, no matter how hard i fought,
it was me who was beaten down.

it was me with the pain in my chest,
the tiredness in my heart,

and please, please, please, don't get me started on these lungs.

pretending to try to be okay

i want to give you everything
i have nothing left to give

there is art everywhere that i go
from artists whose names i may never know
books on shelves that i may never read
and beauties around the world that i may never see
yet when i dream it is not of these missing things
instead, it is of stars that i can never reach
so often my mind floats to places unattainable
that's why my goals aren't set in clouds
rather they are set in galaxies not yet discovered
my point is this
there is already art everywhere that i go
so i plan to place art in places it
and you
and i
have never been

she asked me what my name was. i answered, “ryan, but i am so much more than only that. i am also a writer and a lover. a human and a dreamer. i am neurotic and hopeful and filled with so many anxious thoughts that sometimes i fear i might drown in them, and sometimes i do. i climb mountains just for fun, but i do it often with a shortness of breath. sometimes i want to take my own life, other times i can’t stop smiling and now i am crying but it’s okay, sometimes crying is a necessary thing. i know that i am rambling, my mother tells me i do that too often, ramble, but, you see, i just want you to understand. my name is ryan, yes, and you are free to call me by that name, the name of my skin, if that’s what you please, but, just know, i am so much more than only that.”

the world is constantly spinning—
around our sun,
around our solar system,
around our galaxy,
around our universe,
and out of control.
fox news blames it on the democrats.
cnn blames it on the republicans.
millenials blame it on the last generation for clinging too
tightly to the past.
while the last generation blames millennials for clinging too
tightly to our improbable dreams.
but as it seems to me, human beings are human beings,
and as a collective we're really fucking everything up.
species are going extinct like a taco bell menu on limited
release,
the climate is changing like my girlfriend before a night out,
icebergs are melting like ice cubes in a lukewarm pepsi-cola,
the middle class is disappearing like homer simpson into
another bush,
starvation is consuming the planet like weeds have consumed
the abandoned lot across the street from my childhood
home,
fires are burning down cities like kendrick lamar is burning
down yet another one of my stereos,
flint is still drinking shitty water and puerto rico is still unable
to recover and thousands of girls and boys around the
world are being trafficked right under our noses and
worldwide catastrophes only exist in our minds until a
new drama leaks about one of the fucking kardashians...
the world is constantly spinning—

around our sun,
around our solar system,
around our galaxy,
around our universe,
and out of control.

yet all we do is sit around casting blame.

(and all i do is sit around writing a silly poem with far too
many bad jokes.)

but human beings are human beings,
and as a collective we're really fucking everything up.

3 am is such a beautiful time.
it is when the world sleeps and the dreamers work.
the air is utterly silent.
the only sound being an active mind
working towards a vision
society told them years ago to forget.
when the status quo is forgotten.
when all are equal.

either sleep or work,
at 3 am it's your choice.
those who want will work,
those who settle will sleep.

it is 3 am.
there isn't a sound outside.
no birds chirping.
no crickets chirping.
no anything else that chirps chirping.
there is only you
and your work
and a society demanding you to sleep like the rest of them!
and then there is you refusing to obey.

you have dreams outside of the cubicle
you are bound to from 8 am to 5 pm,
monday through friday—
and sometimes on saturday,
and occasionally on sunday.
3 am is your time.
while the world sleeps and dreams inside of their mind,

you are busy turning dreams into reality.

3 am.

where dreams are all that exists—
and, for the moment,
reality is nowhere to be seen.

but the thing about 3 am is this:
it never lasts.
soon comes 4,
then comes 5,
then 6,
then 7,
then 8.
dreams fade away,
and once more you
and your suit
are back inside the cubicle of reality.

waiting for 3 am to return.

keep pushing.
the world may not be able to see your progress yet,
but soon enough they will.
dreams take time,
daily nourishment,
sweat and blood and tears and occasionally some hair loss,
but then, one day, you'll see the bamboo tree sprouting
through the dirt
and the world will finally understand why you spent so many
hours watering a dream that they could never see.
they will understand why you wiped those tears away and kept
pushing.
kept moving.
kept going.
why you never let the drops of blood deter your pursuit.
why you allowed yourself to go nearly insane watering a tree
they didn't even believe existed.
you see, the world can't see what is taking place beneath the
soil.
they watch you watering a patch of dirt every day for years at
a time.
they call you insane.
a fool.
another lost dreamer.
but one day the bamboo tree will sprout through the dirt.
and the world will call you insane, no more.
keep pushing.

how pathetic am i?

writing a book about suicidal thoughts.

tattooing my skin with reminders to stay alive.

looking her in the eye and promising her everything will be
fine.

laughing with friends as my mind runs circles around topics i
know they don't want to hear.

chasing dreams and rainbows and unicorns because the world
is far too scary a place for me to live in full time.

lying to everyone, even my therapist, because i can only be
honest with a pen and a notepad and an empty room
and a book that will hopefully be read one day by
millions—though i'd settle for even just a couple.

i want to be okay.

i want to want to be okay.

i want to want to want to be okay.

but i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay.

i am not okay!

how pathetic am i?

when i was young, i made a pact with myself—

do not let society win.

even then, i had already seen so many lives shattered by this
omnipresent society:

i saw mothers trapped in jobs that they hated,
fathers stuck in marriages years out of love,
brothers wearing suits to pay off bills long overdue,
sisters chasing lust in all the wrong places,
students accumulating debt for jobs that no longer existed,
and the youth lost in wars fought over everything but peace.
i watched as society slaughtered the innocent
and neutered the hopeful.

yet every day, more and more surrendered themselves to
society's rulings.

why?

because, you see, society presents its prisons so beautifully.
and one day, it made its presentation to me.

it went like this:

look here, young man,

this house, it can be yours!

this garden, you could grow whatever you desire!

*these photographs, they could be of you and your beautiful
family!*

*these vacations, with the oh so sandy beaches, the plane
tickets are right here, all you need to do is reach out and
grab them!*

but before you do,

all that we ask,

all that we require from you,

is that you just play along.

that's it.

so what do you say?

what do i say?

what did i say?

i thought back to the pact i made when i was young—

do not let society win.

i wanted to shake my head,

i want to say no,

i wanted to laugh,

i wanted to walk away with my pride,

but the house was so nice!

and the garden so big!

and the photographs so adorable!

and the vacations so desirable!

so i said yes.

then i slid into my suit,

paid off bills for things my ungrateful kids refused to ever

thank me for,

lied in bed with a woman i slowly grew to hate,

and pretended like everything was okay.

after all, the house was so nice!

and the garden so big.

and the photographs so cute.

and vacations so desirable.

ryan david ginsberg

i love you
and i hate myself
for all the things
i cannot give to you.

pretending to try to be okay

my mind travels down unimaginable roads
while you travel beautiful paths
that my distracted mind
doesn't even notice
passing us
by

i go through changes too often.
i am up and i am down
like a roller coaster with no end.
i am smiling and laughing
then the next day i am crying.
i am kissing her with passion
then the next day i question if i should even keep living.
i write poems about love,
about anger,
about passion,
about tragedy,
and i'm not sure which poem is really me.
which mood,
which day,
which man,
which boy,
which whatever.
i love life
and hate it
all in the same breath.
all in the same poem.
all in the same book.
all in the same mind.
but which side am i,
the up or the down or the somewhere in between?
who is really me?
or are we all just endless beings—
wrapped up in this singular skin,
in this singular mind,
holding onto this singular pen?
which lips will i kiss her with tonight?

which mind will tell her that i love her?
what side will i bring with me—
the smile
or the tears
or the laughter too obviously forced?
is there really a me,
or am i just a vessel
for all the madmen
fighting for your attention?
i don't know, i don't know, i don't know.
i am up and i am down
and this roller coaster never ends.

dreaming is far more complex than i originally believed it to
be
i walk towards my dreams, i see them in my head so clearly,
but the path is filled with obstacles beyond belief
school, job, debt, bills, family obligations are just the
beginning
i turn left, then right, then left, then follow as the path curves
and swivels and reverses and dead-ends then i look up to
see that my dreams are fading in the distance
i try to adjust course, only to find more obstacles waiting
around every corner
i push through thick wall after thick wall after thick wall only
to find myself with a broken arm and a hundred more
walls left to rip down
eventually, i come limping down the alley of temptation
the ground is littered with empty bottles, lost necklaces, ripped
clothing, broken screens, and dreams long forgotten
i look up and see nothing but long legs and beautiful eyes and
i feel hands rubbing against my shoulders and i hear
laughter at every joke that i make
even the bad ones
especially the bad ones!
there are tv screens and instagram feeds lining the walls of the
tiny halls as i attempt to tiptoe out of the alley
but the screens call out my name and i can't help but stop
every couple of steps to watch as unknown lives unfold
before my eyes
i pick up a loose bottle and take a sip
i sit down at the table and throw down a couple chips
i find some long legs and kiss upon her laughing lips

then she whispers in my ear, “tell me what it is that you want
to hear, what it is that you dream about at night, maybe i
can help you find it tonight”

then i look down and see all my long forgotten dreams lying
amongst a mess that only continues to grow by the second
the dreams are hidden behind walls and halls and legs and lips
and empty bottles and lost necklaces and ripped clothing
and broken screens and obstacles beyond belief

and my arm is still broken

and dreaming is far more complex than i originally believed it
to be

i want to buy you a house,
i want to buy you flowers,
i want to take you on dates,
i want to buy you fancy things,
i want to give you vacations on islands so remote
that it'll take three days just to get there,
then i want to buy you those islands.
but my wallet keeps telling me no
and my student loans keeping calling me back
to the bedroom in my childhood home
and my credit card debt keeps taunting me
for my irresponsible past
and i really, really, really want to buy you a house.
someday, we say,
someday.

pretending to try to be okay

that's all we ever seem to do these days—
sit around, waiting for someday to finally arrive.

i've been told that my soul is too old for this body that i've
been given.

i'm too *anti* my generation,

too anti going outside and mingling with people who want
nothing more than a new follower on a social media
account that i really don't understand.

i want a face to face conversation about something other than
the shit that you saw on your screen.

i want to know what is really going on inside of your head—

i don't give a fuck about your timeline,

or about what that model you've never met is wearing or what
is going on in the life of that boy you haven't spoken to
since high school.

i want to know what you think about this strange situation we
find ourselves in:

earth, life, why?

why here?

why us?

why now?

how about you put down that screen and i'll put down this
pen,

we can just look each other in the eyes

and talk for hours on end.

tell me, what do you think is the point of all this...

earth,

life,

why?

she sets her phone down,
looks me in the eye
and listens as i speak about the things on my mind.
but every couple of minutes
i see her peeking over.
she is flipping the phone over in her head,
scrolling through her twitter feed for a few things to retweet.
i stop talking and wait to see how long it takes her to notice.
a few seconds pass,
a few more,
a few more,
a few more.
she picks up her phone without a word,
opens to places her mind had never left.
she smiles,
she scrolls.
i walk away,
she doesn't seem to notice.

i waste hours a day
browsing mindlessly through the internet
for better lives
for better dreams
for better mes
for better anything
i browse homes i could never afford
jobs i could never receive
women i could never get
and friends i could never keep
i browse lives that were never really destined for me
i browse and i browse and i browse and i browse
but once my laptop finally dies
and the screen fades to black
it only reflects me
so i browse that reflection
and what do i see?
an empty browser
a man with no identity
a man with dreams he could never achieve
i see nothing
i see nothing, at all

i wonder what i want from this?
writing poems
to total strangers
about the things going on inside of my mind.
it's kind of funny, isn't it?
how i am so willing to tell you,
my imaginary audience,
all of my deepest secrets.
things i won't even tell my family,
things i won't even tell my friends,
things i won't even tell myself.

suicide crept into my mind again, tonight.
i was just lying here in bed,
thinking about life,
about all the roads i didn't travel
and all the roads that i did.
then this thought crept in:
what if i just stop?
stop wandering down roads that never seem to satisfy me,
stop wondering about roads that i know will never fix me,
stop waiting for roads to appear that i know never will,
stop trying to be what i was never destined to be.
what if i just stop?

the world may think it odd,
the way i pen my demons onto the page.
how i extract them from my mind,
turn them into poetry,
then share them all so willingly.
but, you see, these demons are like cockroaches—
if i keep them in the dark, they are so quick to multiply.
however, they are much less powerful
with the light shining on them.
so the world can think what it wants,
but i have cockroaches in my head
that need to be annihilated.

you looked at me as i spoke,
but you never really listened to my words.
you watched me as i lived,
but you never tried to understand why i did the things i did.
you bandaged up my cuts,
but you never asked me about my scars.
then one day, you went out;
you bought some wood
and you bought some nails
and you bought a fancy hammer.
then with that wood
and with those nails
and with that hammer,
you made a tiny box.
then you had the nerve to blame me
for not fitting inside.

you have ideas in your head,
you've made sketches,
you've written books about who you would like me to be,
you've painted pictures in colors that i have never shown to
you,
you've built lives in your head with me playing roles that i
have specifically told you i do not wish to play,
but those images are not me.
you see, i am not an idea.
i am a human being with complexities,
you cannot just look away when i show you the things about
myself that don't match with the me that you have created
in your head;
i refuse to be constructed by your expectations.
because that me in your head is not me.
i am right here,
trying to show you who i really am.
all i need you to do is listen.
and i will listen to you.

i am terrified of making big life decisions.
not because i don't think myself capable,
i am far too capable of making life-altering decisions
in just a split second.
what terrifies me
is that i don't know who it'll be
that my decisions affect most.
which side of me.
you see, my mind is an apartment with only one on the lease,
but there are dozens that the landlord doesn't know about.
which tenant will it be
that is most affected
by the decision i make today.
and which tenant's decision
is most likely to affect me?
i don't know.
i leave the bill on the table,
hoping another tenant will pick it up—
the decision is theirs,
i'm bowing out.

do not judge me by my past,
i beg of you.
i am not the same person i was that day.
you say you loved me back then,
but please,
please,
please,
don't expect me to be
who i was
way back when.
things have happened,
i have experienced new bruises
that have now become scars.
i have seen things that i still see
every time that i blink.
i've thought thoughts that can never be erased.
i've seen darkness that demons could get lost in.
i've fallen into depths...
simply put,
i am not who you once knew.
so, please,
please,
please,
don't expect me to be.

ryan david ginsberg

i try to smile often.
you do it without trying.

it is sunday afternoon. my stereo is on. it's playing the same
playlist i love to listen to when i am too sad to listen to
anything else.

and i am trying to write.

trying.

trying.

trying.

that's all that i seem capable of doing, lately.

trying.

not doing, not achieving, not accomplishing.

only trying.

goddamn trying.

and i am sick and fucking tired of trying.

but what else is there for me to do? i am forced to wake at the
beginning of yet another day, i am forced to do
something, so what else is there for me to do but to try
again and again?

try.

try.

try.

can you see me? *i am trying!* i am trying so much. every day
that you force upon me, i wake and i try.

but when will my trying ever be enough?

ryan david ginsberg

i do not mean to whine,
i am only attempting to vent,
in a book that i am self-publishing
and begging you to buy.
my, oh, my,
what a time.

my anxiety is back.

well, that line is a little misleading,

because it implies that my anxiety, at some point, actually left.
which is not true.

it is not even close to the truth.

the best my anxiety ever bothers to do is occasionally turn its
obnoxious shouts into whispers.

turn my pounding chest into a somewhat, only slightly, hardly
even noticeable when you spend all of your energy trying
not to notice it, racing heart.

but my anxiety doesn't only live in my chest,

it lives also in my head

where it bangs against my skull,

where it pulls my thoughts through spiral after spiral after
spiral until all the once-was-optimism gets tangled with
pessimism and cruel realities and past experiences and
fears from scenarios i have built in my head for years yet
have never actually experienced in real life, leaving my
thoughts as nothing more than an anxious blob.

it lives also in my hands that can't won't twitching,

in my feet that can't won't tapping,

in my teeth that can't won't grinding,

in my lungs that can't seem to access enough air to fill them to
capacity,

and in many more places that i don't feel like writing down.

so when i say that my anxiety is back, i don't mean that it left
and has returned,

i mean only that it has turned itself back up to a volume so
loud that i can ignore it no more.

ryan david ginsberg

how arrogant am i
to believe that anybody should care
about what i have to say.

as if my opinions
belong atop a pedestal
as i scream,
"hey everybody,
look at me!"

we all have thoughts and ideas
and hopes and dreams
and desires large enough to burn
the world to a crisp,
and yet i am selfish enough
to think
that i am the only one
who dreams.

i put on this pretentious cape,
as if i'm the only one who has
ever uttered the words,
"i am going to change the world."

i brag about accomplishments
i have yet to achieve,
as if speaking them
were enough
to turn them into truth.

pretending to try to be okay

how arrogant am i
to ask you to waste your time
reading my scribbled thoughts.

i write poems
about broken dreams
and expect you to relate
to things that matter to
and involve nobody
but me.

how arrogant am i
to think that i can breathe change
into the world with nothing more
than some written words
and whispered prayers.

how arrogant am i?
very.

i wonder what you think
as my soul rests in your hands.
my confessions so rhythmically written—
suicidal thoughts have never sounded so beautiful,
have they?
my life sure is a mess,
yes,
but the mess makes for such a nice melody,
doesn't it?
the lyrics to my existence are depressing,
sure,
but you want to sing along,
don't you?
don't you?
don't you.

bookstores overwhelm me.
so many shelves,
yet every one of them
is filled to the brim.
excuse me, miss?
can you make a little room
for these words
that i have written?
excuse me, sir?
i know your “to-read” list
is already many pages too long,
but do you think
you can squeeze in
just one more book?
look,
i’ve poured out my soul.
stop locking the door!
please!
please.
please...

ryan david ginsberg

sometimes my mind is too busy
and watching tv is too easy.

please, don't confuse the lives that see
on that screen
as real.
their pictures are altered,
their words are scripted,
their lives cannot be summarized
with just a couple of scrolls.
and i can never be known
through a hundred or so poems
in a book
that i wrote
and edited
and published
myself.

i am not a poet.

my social media might tell you that i'm a poet,
and my mother might tell you that i'm a poet,
and my girlfriend might tell you that i'm a poet,
but i am not, in fact, a poet.

nor am i a writer.

i am just a man who happened to find a pen
and a book for that pen to write in.

but what i am writing is not poetry.

it may look like poetry,

and the book cover may say that it is poetry,

but it is not poetry

and i am not a poet.

i am just a man with a pen and a book

and these words that have mistaken as poetry

are nothing more than thoughts

from a random man with a pen.

that's it.

pretending to try to be okay

we are surrounded by lies,
just trying to survive.

ryan david ginsberg

i wrote a poem about suicide
then made love
in a twenty-minute span,
yet still we try
to convince ourselves
that life is simple.

pretending to try to be okay

every morning, i am handed keys to a classroom
and told to be a good role model for the youth.
and every day i sit, silently, behind my desk,
writing suicidal notes poorly disguised as poetry.

too much of our youth is wasted on foolish lessons:
lessons about gods that don't exist;
lessons about countries that only exist in our minds and
on maps drawn by human beings, not by reality;
lessons about magical creatures that sneak into our house
through the chimney to give us presents or into our
backyard to sprinkle plastic eggs with varying treats
or through our bedroom window to steal our rotten
teeth in exchange for a crinkly dollar bill or under our
door to sprinkle magical dust on our eyes or whatever
it is that the boogeyman does;
lessons about the myth of security;
lessons about the silliness of our childhood dreams—like
being an astronaut or a professional baseball player
or, if you're one of the dumb kids, a doctor or the
hilarious answer of “when i grow up, i just want to be
happy” (idiot child);
lessons about the structure of life as a human being—go
to school, be as popular as you are capable of being
(and do whatever is required to gain that popularity;
play the required sports, date the required girls, make
the required jokes, drink the required amount of
cheap alcohol), then go to college, meet a good girl,
marry her, get a good job (you don't have to like it,
just make sure it comes with a solid combination of
health and dental and whatever the other benefits
are), have 2.3 kids (don't ask how, just do it), raise
them, then teach them the same lessons that were
taught to you in your youth.

pretending to try to be okay

my therapist asked if i ever think of suicide.
i said, "why?
is there something else
i should be thinking about?"

ryan david ginsberg

i write slowly,
because these words are the only things
that are keeping me alive.

there is a duality in my mind that i can't seem to escape
or explain
or change
or understand.
each night i lie in bed and wonder,
who will i be tomorrow?
she looks at me and asks,
will you still love me in the morning?
i tell her i hope so.
she tells me that she hopes so, too.
i hold the gun in my hand and think,
maybe tomorrow i will want to be alive.
or maybe tomorrow i will find the courage to pull the trigger.
or maybe tomorrow i will think of a better way, with less
 blood for my loved ones to clean up.
or maybe tomorrow i will finally understand
or change
or explain
or escape the duality of my mind.
maybe tomorrow i will be somebody new,
maybe tomorrow i will finally be me,
or maybe tomorrow i will not be at all.

every morning, i wake
and water my garden.
the world stares at me,
confused,
because, you see,
the world only sees
me watering an empty patch of dirt,
but i know there are roots spreading below.
and i know, soon,
there will be fruits
to these labors.

pretending to try to be okay

the hardest thing in life
is getting the critic
inside of your mind
to quiet down
just long enough
to make something great.

i'm not sure what i hope to find at the end of this book.
i don't expect my suicidal thoughts to be gone,
i don't expect my insecurities to vanish,
i don't expect to suddenly be okay,
i don't expect fortune or fame,
i don't expect you to understand everything i am trying to say.
i just want to stop hiding.
i want to stop faking these smiles.
i want to be honest.
i want to cut myself open in a way that won't kill me.
i want to shoot out my demons without taking my life.
i want to be okay, someday.
but i'm not sure what i hope to find at the end of this book.

pretending to try to be okay

for every poem that you read,
there are a couple hundred crumpled
in a trashcan in the corner of my room.
you think these ones are bad?
imagine the crumpled ones.

i am a half-jewish, half-catholic boy blended in the middle of
a christian town.

i am a liberal, gun hating, universal health care wanting fool
stuck in a district so red it re-elected devin nunes, again.

i am a hopeless romantic trapped inside the head of a suicidal
pessimist.

i am a writer who constantly needs to google synonyms for
words like sad, mad, and bad.

i am a phone addict who constantly condemns people who are
constantly on their phones.

i am constantly angry and constantly telling my girlfriend to
find the brighter side of a world that, to me, looks nothing
but grey.

i am always writing, always always always, but what the fuck
am i writing about?

what am i writing about?!?!

me.

it is always me.

me, me, me!

i am a fucking narcissist who hates himself yet can't stop
talking about himself and how much he wants to kill
himself.

growing up i was told i needed to go to college
now there is a degree gathering dust on my wall
missing keys on my keyboard from typing up resumes and
cover letters that never received a response
top ramen packages spread across my bedroom floor
the same bedroom i grew up in as a kid
i moved out for a while but was forced to come back
i am 25, almost 26
my student loan debt was 40,000 when i graduated
now it is 45,000
next year, it will be even higher
i want to own a home someday
but, at this point, i'd be proud just to afford rent
for the past few weeks, there has been a soreness in the back
of my mouth
but i can't quite afford dental insurance
so i just try to ignore it
the older generation tells me that i'm entitled
no, i just don't appreciate being lied to

ryan david ginsberg

i'm not depressed every day
in fact, there are often many days between episodes
many days when suicide is far from my mind
many days filled with smiles and laughter
many days occupied only by joy
those are just the days i don't write

pretending to try to be okay

as a child, i promised myself i would inspire the world.
now i just hope to survive it.

i prefer rainy days,
cold beds,
lonely nights,
watered down whiskey,
books on the verge of falling apart,
sad songs,
decaying houses,
stories told by broken hearts,
smiles moments before the tears,
jokes that don't receive any laughs,
shadows on the edge of a crowded room,
parties that are coming to an end,
long walks down empty streets,
flickering lights,
broken down cars,
ranting minds,
unintelligible words scribbled into notebooks,
souls on the precipice of collapse and happiness.
i prefer things that remind me of home.

i want to have kids,
i do,
but i fear they may be like me—
exactly like me.
with smiles so large yet so hard to find.
with minds filled with ideas and voices that are far too loud.
with dreams too heavy to carry.
with wandering souls that don't know when to settle.
with great personalities and anxiety too severe to show it off.
with hilarious jokes that are often misunderstood.
with giving hearts and nothing to give.
with so much love to share and nowhere to keep the love they
 get back in return.
i want to have kids,
i do,
but i fear they may be like me—
exactly like me.

it's so easy to get lost in this world,
there are so many places to hide:
in timelines and feeds,
in television screens,
in memories from the past,
in opportunities that ceased,
in rooms filled with books,
in rooms filled with drinks,
in rooms filled with friends,
in rooms filled with dreams,
in bank accounts that lead to greed,
in vacations overseas,
in poems that ease the pain,
in poems that refuse to rhyme,
in poems that never end,
in poems that don't even bother to make any fucking sense,
in poems about life and suicide and the moments in between,
in poems about me, me, me, me, me,
in poems
in poems
in poems
in...
there are so many places to hide.

pretending to try to be okay

movies promise love,
books promise truth,
songs promise hope,
but life promises nothing,
that's why we write poetry.

ryan david ginsberg

how easy it is
to live vicariously
and not even realize
life
is passing you by.

pretending to try to be okay

i wonder,
have the stars
always shined this bright?
or is it only tonight,
here,
with you lying by my side?

my friend,
why are you
running so fast?
can't you see
all the flowers
along the path?

there is so much pain
in my veins
and these thoughts
that keep swirling through my brain
cannot be restrained
so i grab a bottle
of whatever is within reach
and chug until it is gone
then dial your phone
and ask
will you numb with me tonight?

ryan david ginsberg

life is meant to be multi-dimensional,
with joy and fear
and hopelessness and despair.
enjoy the tears
as much as you enjoy the laughter.
enjoy the love
as much as you enjoy the heartbreak.

pretending to try to be okay

i hope one day
you see the beauty
beneath the scars
you try so hard
to hide away

there isn't an envious bone in my body.
not one.
that's because the envy is actually flowing through my veins,
creeping into my brain,
driving me insane.
i'm just being honest,
i want the success that you're having
but it feels so fucking far away.

by the time this book is released, i will be:
26 years old,
still living at home with my parents,
working a part-time job as a temporary teacher,
45,000 dollars in student loan debt,
8,000 dollars in credit card debt,
finished with 3 unpublished manuscripts,
left with over 200 rejected queries to agents all over the world,
suicidal with waves of normalcy,
normal with moments of suicidal thoughts,
okay,
trying to be okay,
pretending to try to be okay,
begging the world to read my words,
nowhere close to where i imagined i would be.
but there is still time to change this life.
so i will persist,
persist,
and then persist some more.
until, one day, someday, somehow,
i will be:
27 years old
and, hopefully, no longer living at home with my parents.

ryan david ginsberg

there is no such thing as a shortage of time,
only a shortage of effort.

it's okay.
breathe.
this life is a long mountainous hike,
but the peak cannot be reached
without you taking one step at a time.
left, right, left;
right, left, right;
left, right, left.
up the mountain we go,
breathe,
we are that much closer to the peak.

ryan david ginsberg

momma, why'd you ever
let me out of your arms?
this world is such a terrifying place to be,
nothing like those fairy tales
you used to read to me.

these cubicle walls are more like prison bars
and these student loans are handcuffing me to the desk—
i need your goddamn check to get free,
but the interest just keeps rising
and these cubicle walls and prison bars and handcuffs around
my wrists keep thickening.
society got to me in my youth,
when i was too young and naïve to see that its path was paved
with trickery.
yes, sir, right away, sir, anything you say, sir.
yes, sir, i want that check, sir.
yes, sir, i will dance, sir.
yes, sir, i will beg, sir.
yes, sir, i want freedom, sir.
yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir.
yes, sir, you tricked me, sir.
yes, sir, i am yours, sir.
yes, sir, i will follow all your orders, sir.
yes, sir, whatever you say, sir, i just really need that check, sir.
yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir.

“god, why have you done this to me?
why, why, why, why, why!”
is all the man screamed
to the sky
for his entire life,
until the very day he died.
then he finally got his answer.
but his life was already gone
and the answer seemed pretty pointless
by then.

ryan david ginsberg

i just need a moment to sleep.
maybe then these fears will fade away
in the midst of another dream.
but promise me, darling,
that you will wake me if i begin to scream.
i can't take another nightmare.
not tonight.
not now.
please, promise me, darling,
please,
that you will wake me if i begin to scream.
promise me.
promise me.

pretending to try to be okay

somebody once told me,
“you can never truly love
if you don’t first love yourself.”
i told them, “i know that’s not true.”
they asked, “how could you possibly know that?”
i said, “because i hate myself,
yet i love so much.”

i just want to be free—
from this skin,
from this mind,
from this soul,
from this ride around the sun,
from this life.

is it right to judge a person by the totality of their life?
by their childhood bruises, by their teenage year experiments,
by their college year boozing, by their young adult years
lost to mindless wandering, by their first love, by their
second love, by their last love, by their mid-life crises, by
their 2 am slip-ups, by their parental errors, by their
grandparental adjustments, by their retirement spent
making up for all the lost time, by their last clings to life,
by their first slips into death, by their memories that faded
away, by their skin that was once so tiny then so large
then so loose then so baggy then so wrinkly, by their hair
that was once so blonde then so black then so grey?
yes, the name of that person remained the same all along.
yes, the social security number never changed.
yes, the debt followed them everywhere that they went.
yes, the regrets stayed forever on their mind.
yes, the decisions made in their childhood affected the
opportunities in their adulthood.
but was that person with the wrinkly skin and the hair so grey
really the same person that formed all those childhood
bruises?
am the same person that formed all these scars on my arm?
i don't know.

ryan david ginsberg

you make me feel
like i am standing
in an empty room.

pretending to try to be okay

is it fine that my lines
don't always rhyme?
and is it okay
that my words
don't always elicit hope?
will you still read me
then?

ryan david ginsberg

sometimes the world is vivid.
other times it is dull,
colorless,
bland.
but my world is only
a reflection of me.

pretending to try to be okay

i know everything would be fine
if i just sat down and cried,
but i don't have the time to waste.
so i swallow the pain away
and continue aimlessly on
through yet another day.

ryan david ginsberg

how difficult it is
sometimes
to find the perfect words
to describe
what's really going on
inside of your mind.
and how beautiful it is
when those words pour out
so quick
that your pen
can hardly keep up.

pretending to try to be okay

there are hurricanes on the horizon,
butterflies in my yard.
death in the hospital down the street
with newborns crying next door.
there is love and hate
and life in my veins.
i am human
and every moment is fragile.

ryan david ginsberg

there are doubts in the back of my mind
and in the soles of my feet
with every step that i take.
i am just a man
(hardly)
with insecurities flowing freely through my veins.
life often feels like i am climbing a mountain
with my eyes closed
and my shoelaces tied together,
yet i continue to climb.
for what else is there to do with this life
but climb?

pretending to try to be okay

we all want peace,
but don't want to sacrifice.
we want freedom for all
so long as it doesn't affect us.
we are selfish beings,
stop pretending that we
are anything other than that.

ryan david ginsberg

i am trying to be original
while standing in the middle
of an ever-growing crowd.
i am trying to find my voice
while singing in a chorus.
i am looking for love
with the first step
always being towards superficiality.
i am trying to find happiness
in a world full of insanity.

we're all waiting
for that next sunny day
in that greener patch of grass.
then, once the rainy day finally clears
and the sun creeps in through the clouds,
we continue to wait:
for the mud to return to dirt,
then for that dirt to sprout some grass,
then for that grass to grow tall,
then for flowers to surround that tall grass.
but, by the time
the scene is finally picture perfect,
the clouds begin to roll in.
and we are left waiting, once more.

she slams whiskey bottles
against my kitchen floor,
 i slam fists
 against drywall.
there is love in our veins
and deceit in our pasts.
we kiss against holes in the wall,
tiptoe around broken glass,
and wonder if we
can ever truly
love again.

pretending to try to be okay

she held my hand so tenderly,
i rubbed my fingers against her palm.
but i knew
even then
how it would all
inevitably end:
with an empty bed
and journals filled with poetry.

ryan david ginsberg

she looked up at him
with eyes
full of hope
and a heart
that couldn't afford
to shatter again.

the past is such a dangerous place to live,
yet every night it lures me in.
it flashes me with past triumphs,
laughter that led to aching stomachs,
the feeling of falling in love for the first time.
i crawl closer,
closer,
closer.
i tuck myself in with memories of the past.
then the images turn dark—
tragedies,
broken hearts,
tombstones,
kisses that never occurred,
dreams that were left shattered.
i try to turn,
run,
return back home.
but, by that time,
it is too late.
the past has already
wrapped its arms around me.
and the past,
once more,
has consumed me.

maybe this book is too personal for me to release.
maybe i shouldn't air all the demons of my mind.
am i really ready to let this all out?
that i, ryan david ginsberg, battle with suicidal ideation.
am i ready to let my mother know who i really am?
i don't know.
how i pray no one can relate to the words inside this book,
but how i fear there are far too many that can.
maybe this book is too personal for me to release.
or maybe it's not.
maybe the only way to fight the demons of this world
is to first admit that i have demons, too.
so many fucking demons swirling through my head.
but i am fighting them, one poem at a time.
this is just a battle in a war that seems to have no end.
maybe you are fighting, too.
maybe we shouldn't keep fighting all alone.
these here are my demons, but they do not define me.
i am so much more than these words that you have read,
i am so much more than these demons inside my head.
so are you,
so are you,
so are you.

pretending to try to be okay

a conclusion.

so we have arrived. at the end of yet another (likely disappointing) collection of my poetry. and i have already resorted to attempted comedy.

insecurity is oozing from my pen.

please, don't mind the mess that it is making.

i find it odd, how therapeutic it is to write poetry about suicide. to me, it is like a cleansing. and i feel so clean after dumping out my demons for you to peruse, once more.

i know i am expected to say something like: *i thoroughly hope you enjoyed my collection of poetry and i would like to thank the following for making it all possible...*but it would feel so disingenuous and slightly perverted to put that at the end of a poetry collection so heavily filled with suicidal thoughts.

so instead, i will annoy you with one last bit of rambling.

and i go on.

this side of me, the side i have decided to reveal to you in this book, is not the entirety of me. it is only a piece. a small piece, admittedly, but a very important piece, nonetheless.

don't get me wrong, much of my life is spent in swings of mild to extreme depression. i often find myself asking questions like: "what is the point of this life?" and then find myself answering those questions like this: "there is no point. everything and everyone is pointless. we are all just meaningless beings floating atop a meaningless rock as it travels through a meaningless universe." but despite the pessimistic views i have about existence, i don't typically think about killing myself to escape it.

only sometimes.

in fact, suicidal thoughts typically only visit me for a couple of days before fading away for months at a time. sometimes years. but recently the thoughts decided to stick around.

for far too long.

the thoughts were beginning to scare me. i felt myself spiraling out of control—even if that spiraling was only occurring inside of my head; so much of our spiraling only ever occurs inside of our head. i tried to talk it out with my girlfriend, but the thoughts still remained. so i decided to try another round of therapy. it didn't work. i tried to sleep it off, wait it out, run until the endorphins swallowed them whole, but the thoughts only got louder. louder. louder!

so i decided to write this book.

why?

because i have this philosophy. and that philosophy goes like this:

if i take my biggest fears and put them into writing, assign them to some fictional character or some fictional words, then maybe i can remove those fears from myself.

if i kill myself in writing, then maybe i won't have to kill myself in real life.

that is why i write poetry about suicide.

because i would rather kill a fictional me than resort to killing the me that lives inside the physical world. the very physical world that is quickly falling apart.

and i go on.

i have written this book in complete secrecy. i haven't told my girlfriend about this book nor my parents nor my friends nor the therapist that i was seeing at the time i began writing this book. i just needed to write it without hearing the

words of concerned loved ones. i just needed to write and see what would come pouring out, oozing out. i just needed to discover how i really felt inside.

so i wrote this book in secrecy.

i pondered over suicidal thoughts alone in my bedroom for hours on end.

i killed myself, fictionally. i removed my demons through ink. i healed myself in the most fucked up way imaginable.

by writing poetry about suicide. and then turning those suicidal poems into a book. and then asking people to buy that book filled with suicidal poems.

and i go on.

this isn't the first time i have tried out this philosophy. in fact, i have done it multiple times. remember those dusty manuscripts i mentioned in the introduction? well, each of those was written to help kill off a part of me that needed to be killed.

maybe that's the way suicide should be committed.

not to the total person, but instead only to bits and pieces of that person.

to the pieces that really do need to be killed.

and i go on.

in this book, i attempted to wrestle my deep-rooted insecurities—like the fact that i will be 26 at the time this book is released and i will have very, very, very little to show for it: except for two self-published collections of poetry, three unpublished manuscripts, 200 rejected queries, a bedroom in my childhood home, 45,000 dollars worth of student loan debt, 8,000 dollars worth of credit card debt, dozens of friends living their lives in big cities, many more friends who now own their own homes, some friends who are married, others

who are expecting babies, some whose babies have already arrived, all while i pretend to be a writer who can't even afford the thoughts of buying a home or a diamond ring or a new pair of shoes or an editor for this shitty collection of poetry.

see?

insecurities gone.

gone, gone, gone.

and i go on.

i am a mess, i know it, but i will continue to work through my flaws with more words.

more collections.

more books.

more manuscripts.

more, more, more, more, more.

prepare yourself.

because even though this book is now over.

i shall go on.