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Things I (say and don't) mean

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THINGS I (SAY AND DON'T) MEAN

A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

By

Caitlyn Lee Finger

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MASTER'S THESIS

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THINGS I (SAY AND DON'T) MEAN

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SPUN SUGAR

OUT OF PRINCIPLE

God said in an interview
there are six universes
between which the
only differences involve
which *Friends* actor remains
popular after the series ends.

So, when my mother watched the last
episode of *Friends* and cried
this was understandable,
it was the end of an era.

Now I refuse to watch the final episode
of a television series,
even the shitty ones, just to be safe.
I know this isn't Schrödinger's
cat but why risk the quantum system's
superposition and a dead cat?

THINGS THIS MAYBE ABOUT

Maybe this will be about how I inherited a pair of matching green reclining chairs, lightly used, from my grandparent's when I moved into my first apartment. How I put one in the living room and kept the other (the one my grandfather died in) in my bedroom, because it was the one place I could sit and not feel anything or how when they didn't fit into my next apartment I sold them for \$50 to some fraternity brothers and left those recliners to die in a fiery booze soaked glory like I believe my grandfather probably wanted to, if he had still been allowed to drink. Maybe this will be about how I can't bring myself to sell this used couch of ours on craigslist because I am not quite sure how this one wants to die.

2003

Babysitting,

(I wanted to create my
own babysitter's club),

channel surfing,

(in my defense an infant
has no real program preferences),

Bush (the second) announced the invasion of Iraq,
or something. The television playing B-roll
or was it live footage, of
some place previously nonexistent to me

(still nonexistent to me),

flashing into smolder

under green-gray smoke.

Panicking

(scare tactics work,
at least on this thirteen year old),

I called my mother,

they did not teach this situation
in the course I took at the YMCA
that certified me to essentially
channel surf with small children.

If a stranger knocks on the door
or someone lightly scrapes a knee
those I had training for,

(I thought maybe we
could add "what to do
when your country invades
another country"
to the meeting agendas, as)

my mom explained war
would not happen *here*,
at least *not like it would there*
also to *change the channel*.

I watched for some time,
without understanding

(still without understanding)

until I got bored

and moved on. This is how we are with the news
(and maybe our interest in
babysitter's clubs too).

TELEVISION MONSTER

A robot has taken my job at the library,
for now it just collects money for the copy machine,
but I can tell by the mechanical swivel of its
emotionless eyes that it has higher ambitions.
Those eyes will leave us thumb twiddling
with nothing to do but watch the television monster
eating up our humanity,
after having infiltrated our homes, bars,
hospitals, airports, even the parks and public restrooms
for a longitudinal study on how much a life is worth.
And if not the television monster than surely the microwaves,
automobiles or possibly the dish washers and let's not
forget the computers.

(THINGS THAT HAPPEN) WHETHER WE WATCH THEM OR NOT

city noise slept with the sun's setting

it's getting loud out as

a spool of spun sugar

(thanks to just the right atmospheric pollution)

purple in color

wanders into oncoming day

not listening

NOTES ON A PR PITCH TO GOD TO VISIT THIS SIDE OF THE INFINITE UNIVERSE

I've known the inside of this supercluster for thousands of years now and find it particularly suitable to this millennium. It has some of the safest black holes on this side of existence, with rent to own constellations and over 100 quadrillion other planets. Our bonus offer this month is club access to over 100,000 galaxies in any sister supercluster of your choice. Full disclosure, there is a still slight human infestation in one regular sized galaxy, although I believe that it is limited to one planet.

THINGS WE (TASTE) LIKE

you are my
caramel salted sardine
flavored laugh
I am your
various prescription
serotonin reuptake inhibitors
we are mostly
chemical reactions
heartbeats of
angular momentum

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE: INITIATION

It was out of comradery
or a deep sense of wanting to,
the scavenger hunt
calling for t-shirt and toothbrush thievery
and running, actual running, from campus
police while trying to access the roof for more clues
and being blindfolded in the back of a car
tricked into a low stakes Rumpelstiltskin-esque
drinking game, to be
abandoned drunk
under the glitter of actual starlight
in the crisp quilt of Iowa farmland.

RIVERBOAT CASINO

The hotel employees are told
not to treat Tony Danza like a
celebrity, the exact instructions are:
do not ask for his autograph, do not
look him directly in the eyes, do not
try to live out any teenage fantasies,
do not ask him about this latest
movie,
 (the one he was working on with
 the dreamy actor I now claim to know
 through less than six degrees of separation)
 and you are asked to remake a bed
in his suite and tell me about how
from the window you watched
his entourage and their matching rented
Corvettes as they zoom from
the parking lot of the hotel
to the one across the street attached to
the casino. The Diamond Jo, which at one
time was a fully functioning riverboat casino
before they let her grow legs,
walk ashore, and morphed
her to accommodate
Tony Danza doing whatever
it is one does to
entertain the human moths
with their wings of cigarette smoke
bouncing off the neon of slot machines,
 some of which migrated over from
 the old gambling cruise, (now
 anchored in a neglected barge harbor
 by where my mother traded grain for
 years, before the commodified niche river tourism
 before there was money pulled from river bends
 renovated from abandoned packing
 houses, particle board factories,
 and hidden porn shops on leftover
 brick roads and
 while all of this
 was under construction, we hid in
 in shadows with backpacks
 full of beer moving
 construction signs to

block off new streets,
caution taped whole
intersections, walked
through what buildings
we could find our way into,
left a bread trail of empties,
making our way down to the
recently closed grain station,
where my mother was laid off,
where the empty river boat casino
is docked just close enough for us
to try to scale, we took turns trying
to climb aboard, watching for the
police or ghosts of the millwork district.)

IF (ORDERING) THINGS (ONLINE) COULD HELP ME FEEL WHOLE

I'm seven orders away from
feeling like a complete human,
 (just missing a populations-worth of books
for the library of *things to pretend to have read*
when they come up at a cocktail
party that doesn't exist and no
one will ever be invited to,
but this dress,
this dress is:
completeness in
5-7 business days, is
a pair of spanks or a slip away from a sense of
confidence
in things owned
(even those yet to be owned)
so I can assign them to (separate
categories of) myself.

NOW

I see only the comet tail of your black aura
as you pass quickly by the fisheye lens of my peephole,
or the light flash of your reflection in a review mirror
from the backseat of a car in which you will never ride.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE: PARTICIPANT

After having earned my sisterhood,
the scariest part was driving back roads,
looking for a group of girls who've been told to stay
linked together
and to hide in a ditch if they hear a car coming, and hope
that they were good at hiding
and this wouldn't turn into a Lifetime movie.
So, I did not assign chores or encourage
tangoing with bored campus security but
I did eat the meals others were asked
to cook and whispered the way back to town
in the ear of the most sober
because someone had once whispered it to me.

IMAGINATION GAME

Imagine one day, you as your kid self walking around, perhaps at a playground or on an unsuspecting beach where you pick up a rock. Imagine you have to keep that rock because suddenly that rock is your half-sister. Now, imagine you are five and dressed up as a pumpkin because it is Halloween and imagine the person who just rang the doorbell in football pads and pigtails is that rock. Not rock as a metaphor for a strong person, and not to imply she is not a strong person, but rock as a door opening that quite frankly you could've used a warning for. Imagine explaining that to everyone who politely asks you if you have any siblings. Imagine trying to work in the second half-sister to this. Imagine years later finally understanding a six month age gap and what that would have meant to your mother. Imagine never calling your father "dad." Imagine it just gets easier to lead with trick statements like, "I am my mother's only child," the code words for your social class, imagine it's not. Imagine you fear you won't understand your own children if you have more than one.

TRIPTYCH

1.

In order of most to least important
the other parts of the car are breaking down in support
of the neglected check engine light.

2.

This satanic symbol spray-painted
on the middle of the bridge better view
of the river than you do from your apartment.

3.

You woke up from a dream and this is little league,
everyone gets a trophy except for you, you had a shit attitude
and we warned you about that.

THINGS ABOUT COOKING

There is no love in this meal
just two empty plates,
the table's nipples basking
in an air buffet. The idea came
from a cooking show or someone
else's imagination. I deconstructed
it all from scratch and threw out
everything that looked too
beautiful. You rave, it tastes just like you
licking the reflection of yourself
off a spoon.

ALTERNATIVE MATH

(THINGS PROBABLY) OVERHEARD FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE (NOT) MADE UP

I want a neon orange leopard print pumpkin spice latte
with an extra shot of a few thousand followers
to constantly update my false sense of achievement.
I want to feel any sense of achievement,
even if false. I want to be chased off the end of a cliff like an Acme cartoon character and hover
so I can snap a picture of it all.
I want to do club drugs with God,
honestly if I had the chance I would totally fuck him
but I doubt he is the hook-up type.
I want to crawl to the middle of my ceiling and die with the spiders who have already done so,
making a spectacle of ourselves.

LAWN ORNAMENTS

Midnight bandits
shoeless by moon-light,
we stole cheap lawn
ornaments to see if anyone
would even notice us,
 until they did
and put up a sign in their
yard pleading for the thieves to bring
back their lawn angel, the one
to remind themselves of their dead
someone.

 Instead we lined
our loot up on someone else's
front walkway a sacrifice to mischief
in return for a false sense of control.

 As pay back,
we must always feel
guilty when we remember this,
blessed with scars from
when we tried to
grab time and it slid away
burnt our hands.

FISH FLIES

They feel like silt in the mesh of swimsuit lining or the annoying creep of sweat that pools and then glides behind the soft spot of a knee.

They incubate between the moist air and steaming grime of the river, hatch from the top skin of water with the smell of fish, invade after sundown and paint the downtown buildings a glossy pale yellow.

Instinct tells them to migrate towards the stars but confused they stay to eat city lights instead. On nights like this even the houses above the river valley feel dirty as they make their way up the hills.

Driven mad by the dead still of summer, we would drive fast just to feel wind again. They covered entire parking lots with their stupid eyes and sticky feet bathing under the florescent glow; where we would test centrifugal force by skating our tires over the smooth squish of their stained-glass yellow wings listening for their popping sounds as they let out the rotten smell of the river.

NOTES ON COMPARISON, TWO WINDOWS

1.

At home I had to keep an old candle lit (one from those catalog parties I used to attend with my mother on school nights, the type of gatherings that featured mayonnaise based finger foods and buy three get two free specials in which we could never find a fifth scent we agreed on), in an attempt to mask the smell of smoke I pushed out my bedroom window and fooled no one. I listened to the absolute silence that is an Award Winning All-American City comforted by the same houses I've always observed tucked into the familiar hillsides.

2.

Now where I am, not home but residing in cluster of boxes within larger concrete boxes, my smoke is tangled in the aroma of food I didn't cook or in the aura of those passing by in the hall. My view is of more boxes and I have gathered that many of them are empty, but there are people sleeping in the bushes outside of the empties and to stop this urban camping someone has removed all the shrubbery in the neighborhood. I memorize the clutter on window sills, the fuzzy outline of art on yellowing walls, silhouettes of people through blinds half closed to keep me out. I listen to the industrial roar and let its exhaust wash over me.

WANTING QUANTIFIABLE EVIDENCE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

For the two weeks you
dangled on those hospital strings
we wished it was over
because conclusions, no matter
its character, makes things easier.

//

It snowed the day of your funeral,
the big cotton candy type of fall
just enough for someone to write your name on
the football field, but the ground wasn't frozen
enough to stop the dramatic act of
burying a body.

//

That spring in an effort to feel normal
we went in our rented trolley
all promed-up and took pictures
with the portrait of you etched in stone
above where you had just started to decompose.

//

Desperate for answers by summer
on the clearest nights we
swam through the hedges
guided ourselves
by starlight and sat pretzel-style above
what was left of you.
We asked the Ouija board for a name
and it spelled out yours after that
we took everything as the
whole truth,
even when we asked
for your favorite color
(which we knew to be orange),
and the answer was teal,
we accepted your ability to change your mind
from under all that dirt.

//

We asked: Is this like a telephone?
k i n d o f
Where are you now?
c a n t t e l l
Do you miss us?
yes
Did you make it snow?
yes
Do you remember the accident?
Were you really pregnant?
Drunk?
Switching seats?
The answers mattered less as
we returned to our familiar
gossiping selves, comforted
we visited less.

//

By fall we scattered away
from home, became strangers
to ourselves, and when we did
return with board and blankets
where we had left you, we asked for
your name and it never came.

THINGS (YOU ARE) PROBABLY NOT

There are 3.6 billion
acres of
self,
occasionally it orbits
the body like
an inky eye floater
(or is the burden
of arguments
argued with yourself or the lingering
smell of garlic following you around from
last night's dinner)
or are the shells of ideas from which the
acres of yourself
bloom.

DAILY

I restart my laptop 59 times
and toggle the quantum
network of myself, I bargain
with the inanimate and pray:

Great Computer,
 collect me like plastic grocery bags.

Oh wise touchscreen,
 paint me into your still life,
 I am an object underneath the kitchen sink.

THINGS I THOUGHT I WOULD REMEMBER MORE

1.

Night and the view through the van windshield is the familiar
dim flicker of an old movie projecting
our path by headlights up and down the spiny back of the rain forest:
sounds of howler monkeys and wind
whipping through leaves on what I wouldn't call
a road more like a warning as to the current state of things.
this moment, the discovery of the scorpion in
my shower stall after I was already naked and
the houses are what I remember most.

2.

In rural Belize some homes are built on stilts, they look like baby giraffe legs fighting gravity for the first time over dry cracked lowlands. Those shacks hover like little islands over the flooding months and I'm not sure what they do in there while they wait for the water to dry up.

EN ROUTE

Lost and looking for who we might be
on someone else's map, we are
rumbling down
a two lane highway
with unmarked pavement to
self-improvement,
which is actually just a road
with a low shoulder always
under construction with
detours through valleys of contradiction.
Big dreams are the precious
packed cargo on delivery to
Fresh Start,
Out West,
Anywhere But Here.

SELFISH: NOTES ON BECOMING

After you've properly juiced your economy

fold two time-points of your past self in

half and use the laser of pretentious to

narrow in on your areas self-preservation.

(Use autofind function to save time.) Analyze

this for no longer than a millisecond, if

you apply your alternative math here

you should be the square root of your

parent's worst features. Download this into

several areas of your psyche to guarantee

it comes up at all possible moments.

THE GUY

He takes a sallow bubble bath,
fashions a bubble crown for himself,
remembers when this is all he needed
to make people smile.
It takes a lot out of a guy,
to be a vessel for God.
He was given this tub of
butter he isn't sure he can chisel
into anything meaningful. He
walks around all day with a swell
in his chest he's not allowed to make
excuses for, but has created
several in case.

LATELY EVERYTHING

Lately I felt like lipstick
on a platypus,
everything has felt heavy
except for the things that don't,
 time is a chart in some
 kindergarten classroom in a comic
 book about what it means to
 be seven degrees from the self
 I've imagined
 I could be;
and if I cannot beat myself
I will join myself in
a college of my other selves.

SMILE/MORE

There is a man with
missing front teeth
holding a sign that reads
SMILE on one side and
MORE on the other. He is
spinning his piece of cardboard
with all his thoughtfulness, depending
on the car and its passenger
waiting under the bridge with him,
whether or not he feels like
you should smile or give him
more.

I am flipping between
picking bridesmaids and
what to make for dinner,
trying not to make direct eye contact
as I wait at the red light and not to
hate myself for everything
I am at this moment,
for how after this light
changes I'll forget that
buck tooth grin
so I can keep
smiling.

DREAMING STATE

Now she finds herself in front of a classroom searching through her purse for a dry erase marker and she can't read anything on her notepad and only half the timeline of literature is drawn on the white board and these sheep aren't going to continue to disinterest themselves. Someone once told her *that if you rehears in your head before you go to sleep the things you want to master you will get better at them in waking life*. So she started having these nightmares where she was mid-recital and couldn't stop doing Fouettes. Sometimes the breaks would go out in her car while approaching a downhill intersection. Or sometimes, though she does not live near the ocean, she is on the top floor of a thousand-story skyscraper as a wave swallows the coast line and she rides the building's fall like a surfboard. But now, now, she can't read her notes on Sappho and doesn't want to be another person who simply passes over her in an introduction course and the sheep have begun to eat their handouts and shit in the corners.

PATIENCE BITCHES

(ANOTHER) TRIPTYCH

1.

I want to take e v e r y t h i n g
apart and at the same time put it back together.
I want to eat my cake and fuck it too.

2.

What used to hurt feels just beautiful now,
that's the dopamine speaking
or the sunset isn't working
hard
enough
today.

3.

Fold two wiggly paths
around a black hole,
it might be that
this time machine
goes only to the future.

AD FOR ROBOT SEX DOLL

Welcome to the age of the 3D printed
relationship: you'll enjoy a wide range of
build your own options.
You can frack each model 16 times
before it needs to be recharged.
Experts say its only infidelity
when you feel emotions towards it.
We renamed the clit DISH
so you could have 10 years of free service
upon sign up. She'll laugh at your jokes and
love you in organic Facebook likes.

THINGS SEEN WHILE WALKING TO A BUS STOP

brighter shades of sunrise
reach through smog and cement.

an ice cream truck,
freezers now benches
stacked with orange jumpsuits,
stops to pick up trash or
plant flowers
along the underbelly
of interstate

where the
shushshushshush
of passing cars is
decoded
by those restless with
the banter of the city:

patience bitches
cunt only when you need to be
Rediscover communication
FUCKING PUKES
hand painted on little rocks
I collect them.

my steel whale arrives,
releases air from its blow hole,
dislocates its jaw,
I step in
pockets full.

THE GUY (AGAIN)

After he listens to everything backwards,
podcasts, commercials, even audiobooks,
and decodes the latest prophecy, he
argues with copy editors then
throws himself off the roof
and lands, feet first, unharmed.

WHEN SMARTPHONES DATE

We decorate the tree on our front lawn with dead animals found in the neighborhood. We train the dog to eat with her hind legs and to wipe her face before excusing herself from the table. We have two of everything so we can sell half to buy more. Our days of the week have astronomical relevance and because it is good luck, we only punch those with gold teeth. We know we are better than everyone so we only take pictures of the backs of ourselves. We don't believe in eating anything but air whipped sea foam from a copper plate, we invented umami.

QUESTION

Is there nothing

you can do in the next five

days to become a better person?

Or are we all right?

is He not that kind

of Messiah? Or did

it already happen, and we just

didn't notice?

What then is imitation crab,

if he is nothing and something comes from him?

THINGS I HAVE YET TO FACT CHECK

Twice as many Americans die from peanut allergies as from terrorist attacks. Each year billions of birds die flying into clean windows.

In case of the apocalypse hand-warmers can absorb oxygen to preserve food. A black hole is a black hole until it evaporates, *they have their own agenda.*

The average household income will pick up anything shiny, Neil deGrasse Tyson will stop for a stray quarter, and Donald Trump would look past anything less than forty-five thousand dollars

(also see: the poverty cycle, the cycle of domestic abuse, the water cycle, privatizing the prison system). What they are feeding us may or may not be food.

How can the earth be free falling toward the sun, a mosquito flying into an elephant, and yet it doesn't matter what way you turn its all moving away from you?

THINGS I WOULD LIKE TO DECLARE

A baby in water already knows
the mechanics of walking.
It is our collective memory that
gives us the ability to move
those pudgy baby knees,
how to hold ourselves up against
the pull of gravity. The earth
is moving faster than a jet plane
so we must master the art of forgetting
to notice the constant movement
of the earth. We've just taught ourselves
to ignore our ride on this spinning ball of color,
how we are always in the thrust and
drag of the present.

ANXIOUS

The clouds
looked like an atomic explosion
today. I tried taking pictures of them
but they continued to look like clouds.
The sun's peachy ink was swallowed
by horizon. Everything followed
no one was worried
but

THE GUY (AGAIN) AGAIN

Today he felt encouraged, as though
he could download all the puppy
videos from the internet. Today he
jumped from a rooftop for the flight
of it. Then he thought,
there is no time just now
and the inevitable could be,
and was ashamed of his
contradictions, he thought
I am the worst kind.

HUMBUG STATE PARK, OREGON

fog

slobbers cold onto

sand dark follows in behind

fills leftover

spaces

waves of horizon

endlessly push

then

drag

salt water certainty

rotten wood and the absence

of things

(A DIFFERENT) IMAGINATION GAME

a construction crane
holds up the distant mountains,
grass is swaying, the
trees are holding their arabesque,
buildings are breathing long shallow breaths
no one
notices but

today I can feel the library
sigh and you have become like color
in all of your nonexistence
a reflection of the absence.
I want to believe:
my eyes are projectors
and everything flickers off when they close,
mountains turn to a static of pepper and salt
the grass switches off its iridescent fiber optic lamp,
the trees stretch their limbs like dancers backstage
the buildings slouch with relief or
that I could materialize you.

THINGS I'VE SEEN DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF MYSELF DO

1.

She wakes to the sprinkler
system snapping out from
its underground lair and
joins it on the lawn,
together they hiss
at the street lamps blocking
the light of her five year plan.

2.

Emerging from some woods,
she drags girlhood to a clearing,
hacks it up in roastable sizes
chars the shell, afterwards she
picks meat from her teeth and
builds a necklace of all the times
she looked at herself in the mirror.

3.

After a rain storm she is spotted running
down the median of an interstate naked.
Keeping up with the passing vehicles, she is
the neon purple blur of self-confidence
trailing behind herself a desperate
comet of flailing flab.

4.

Her shadow passes
herself while on roller skates,
spins and doubles back to
scoop out all her undesirable
parts, puts them all in a backpack
then glides away again,
all while *whistling*
never gonna get it
never gonna get it.

5.

In a crowd
sees herself
and self begins to
wave at her:
desperate
for attention but
she looks around
herself and pretends
that they've
never met.

THINGS I (SAY AND DON'T) MEAN

I am full of crushing certainty
everyone has gotten fat, that

love can dissolve on the tongue
like a communion wafer, that

no one has ever meant
if your happy I'm happy,

and that I (with every sense of
certainty), am only
versions of self.

(THINGS I AM) WITH ALL OF MY WILDNESS

I am not lines of poetry I promise
 myself I will remember,
I reserve this sense of loss in order to
 hate myself at a later date.
I trick myself into thinking it is day when
I am the night breeze that wrestles the hanging
plant, the fluff ball terrier's confident bark, the
pinpoint spectrum of color poked into myself.

NOTES

“OUT OF PRINCIPLE”

Ideas about *Friends* and multiple universes borrowed from “A conversation with God,” Star Talk Radio Podcast, Neil deGrasse Tyson. Podcast, Feb. 2014.

“THINGS I HAVE YET TO FACT CHECK”

Facts pulled from “Is There a Better Way to Fight Terrorism?” Freakonomics Podcast, Stephen J. Dubner. WNYC. Podcast. Feb. 2015.

Neil deGrasse Tyson’s “Bill Gates Wealth” theory.

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