

A CATALOGUE OF WINGS

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

GRACIE RAE SEGUIN

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Approved by Research Advisor:

Dr. Sara DiCaglio
Dr. Jason Harris

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ABSTRACT

A Catalogue of Wings

Gracie Rae Seguin
Department of English
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Sara DiCaglio
Department of English
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Jason Harris
Department of English
Texas A&M University

What does form do for the way creative nonfiction is read, and what effect does it have on our ability to express narrative truth? Many definitions of creative nonfiction have understood the genre as dedicated to communicating truth. However, contemporary writers of creative nonfiction often create narratives that bend the rules of genre. If nonfiction must express truth, then its very form must contribute to its believability. As some experiences or emotions may be true, but also fall outside of language, the way in which we write and understand truth cannot be so absolute, and the forms of creative nonfiction cannot be limited to one method. By researching and creating hybrid essays that experiment with form, this project explores what makes narrative truth, and whether formal decisions change the way something is true. This work builds upon previous work on the idea of hybrid genre and lyric essays. I approach the ideas of transformation and potentiality through experimental essay to see how form affects the understanding and expression of the truths of these ideas.

DEDICATION

to g.n.p, for everything and always

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors, both formal and informal: Dr. Marcela Fuentes for showing me that I am strong enough to break open my cocoon, Dr. Jason Harris for sitting with me while my wings dried, and Dr. Sara DiCaglio for showing me how to fly (and also for the coffee).

Thanks also go to my cohorts in the Aggie Creative Collective; Katie, Hannah, Zoe, Amy, Grace, Kyrie, and John for giving me a group of people who understand the call and torture of being consumed by the need to tell a story. Thank you for the late-night writing sessions, cry sessions, movie nights, and support. I could not have done this without you all.

Further thanks to my father for showing me what hard work looks like, and to my mother for reminding me that I actually have to write to be a writer.

Finally, thank you Gay and Robin for being my best friends, my greatest encouragement, my most profound inspiration, and for everything else.

SECTION I

RESEARCH QUESTION/MOTIVATION/ARTIFACT

My question asks what form does for the way a text, namely an essay, is read and perceived, and the effect that form has on our ability to explore narrative truth, specifically the themes of transformation and potentiality.

Historically, essays have been written in what Lyn Hejinian, speaking about poetry and writing more generally, refers to as closed text, or “one in which all the elements of the work are directed toward a single reading of it. Each element confirms that reading and delivers the text from any lurking ambiguity” (Hejinian 2000). What this means is that the point or purpose of the essay is stated explicitly, leaving less to be interpreted. The opposite of this is an open text, in which “all the elements of the work are maximally excited; here it is because ideas and things exceed (without deserting) argument that they have taken into the dimension of the work” (Hejinian 2000). What this means is that a text may be open to the interpretation of the reader and writer alike. This creates a cosmic spectrum in which the essay can live, taking whatever form lends to the ability for the reader to exist in the narrative as well. This can be done, for example, through white space, stanzas, or lists, such as in Sarah Manguso’s *300 Arguments*, which gives statements and questions with no explanations or answers.

My approach to this project was to use this idea of open text style to create that excited narrative argument. I wanted to do this with the lyric or hybrid form essay because it lends to a more flexible set of rules or writing guidelines and allows the narrative to flow more freely and exceed that argument or theme. It often does this through a merging of the essay with poetry

without a set determination of what constitutes the lyric essay. Therefore, the possibilities of what this can look like are endless.

The topics of my essays— loosely organized around the topics of potentiality and transformation— are particularly worth exploring through hybrid forms because they rely heavily on the experiences of the reader. Feelings do not lend to absolute truth, and therefore, reading an essay with the intention to define the feelings absolutely is futile. Opening the narrative through the opening of form allows these ideas to exceed any kind of argument one might be trying to or wanting to make. This allows the words to go beyond simple language and definition into the realm of emotional intelligence, where ideas may be understood on a different plane. The artifact I created is a collection of these experimentations of hybrid form and lyric essays attempting different styles. For example, prose, poetry, lists, and catalogues. Each one is an exploration and experimentation of what these varying styles can do for the way we understand literature and emotional truth and how writing something in a different form can elicit different responses.

SECTION II

LITERATURE REVIEW/BACKGROUND/HISTORY/SOURCES

In order to undertake this project, I looked to a number of works that have used a variety of hybrid elements to create an experience for the reader. For example, Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* uses a lack of sentence transitions to create a disconnected narrative of her childhood, allowing the narrative to move beyond the concrete and into a more flexible understanding of time and memory. *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson employs numbered sections to create separated essays that transition smoothly into each other to create a cohesive narrative of individual essays. Anne Carson's *The Glass Essay* is seemingly not an essay at all, but a poem that reads very much like an essay, thus questioning what makes an essay an essay and who is to decide. Through this formal experimentation, writers leave the idea of what is absolute truth up to interpretation. It is these works along with many others that challenge the way we approach the non-fiction narrative and how the very nature of what it is may be understood.

I wanted to explore the idea of cataloguing and lists in the project to produce feelings and ideas without the use of a narrative or story arc, and leave much of the purpose to be gleaned through a reader's own lens. The openness of the hybrid essay also allowed me to experiment with white space, punctuation, stanzas, or narrative prose, which minimizes the restriction of expectation and structure. White space, or functional space works as a silence or pause in poetry – a breath that Kimiko Hahn's *Brain Fever* uses, along with many different forms such as epigraphs and erasure. I was especially interested in finding other essays that make use of these functions, so I read through *The Next American Essay* by John D'Agata. For this one, I focused most on finding essays that utilized the pauses of the functional white. Jenny Boully has an essay

in the collection, *The Body*, that takes the body of the essay out completely leaving only footnotes for the reader to use to piece together the narrative. *The Theory and Practice of Postmodernism: A Manifesto* by David Antin is also in the collection, and almost completely abandons the use of capital letters and punctuation, and employs the use of *caesura* or pauses in the middle of lines. In the first of these examples, the white space creates a grander pause as the reader realizes this narrative is missing its most integral piece. It forces the open-ended idea as functional white must be filled in with the reader's own interpretation of what little they are given. In the second example, the caesuras force the reader to take a breath, to make note of what is coming next and how it does or does not connect with what came before or after. It is a pause of emphasis in both examples. These kinds of prose that bend or ignore the usual standards of language have encouraged my experimentation, and given me an idea of what has been done. Anne Carson especially is a master of the hybrid essay, combining poetry, prose, history, and myth into her work, creating a collage of imagery and emotion. I looked at much of her work, including *Autobiography of Red*, *Plainwater*, *Eros the Bittersweet*, *The Beauty of the Husband: A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos*, and *Glass, Irony, and God*. All of these are done with some different craft, such as novel in verse, and block prose, both of which I have incorporated into my own work.

In addition, these kinds of hybrid forms are appropriate for brevity, which I was also interested in employing for my thesis. Shorter pieces have less room to make their point, but also the opportunity for greater impact. I read Sarah Manguso's *300 Arguments* which is a collection of one or two line arguments or statements, each one eliciting a flurry of thought and questioning. Their factual brevity takes a reader by surprise, and I endeavored to utilize this effect in my own essays.

SECTION III

EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT/VENUE

I gave a presentation of my thesis at the URS Symposium held in the MSC at Texas A&M University. It was an event organized by URS, and was open to all undergraduate research scholars. There were a variety of rooms set up, each with a different group during a one hour time slot. I was given the option to create a PowerPoint for my presentation, but I elected not to do that. Instead, I wrote a short explanation of my project and selected four of my essays in different styles to read as an example of my work. After giving the presentation, there was a Q&A and then a critique or feedback from those who had volunteered to be active listeners. The presentations were open to anyone who wanted to come listen. My presentation had about five people besides the listeners. I gave my presentation first, and then was able to listen to the two other presentations after mine. There were not any questions during the Q&A, but I was given some useful feedback about my presentation (like nervous habit, and lack of visual aids). They did tell me that they were a bit lost as to what my research was, and gave me ideas on how I could make it clearer in the future, including using a power point next time. They were also enthusiastic about my essays and my reading style. Overall, it was a good experience to help me become more comfortable with future public presentations, and encouraged me to give more details about my research.

SECTION IV

REFLECTION

My artifact came along rather surprisingly to me. It grew and developed with time and experience. I started out writing a memoir about watching my grandfather die. To that end, my research included memoir reading and books and instructions on writing memoir, as well as speaking to people who were involved in his death and had memories to contribute. My process then was to write down these memories and put them into a narrative structure.

Over the course of a few months, I found myself writing other things, things not for the memoir, and in them I found more immediate satisfaction. I stopped trying to pull memories from a painful time in my life, and instead focused on these other things that were happening in my life. I walked down sidewalks and picked up leaves and acorns, dead insects and feathers, and through them I collected story and emotion, things I wanted to share. There was some kind of transformation taking place in each of them, whether through decay or through the potential of what I could create from them. These were feelings I could put into the open-ended format of lyric essay; the potential of what these nature things I collected could become or do. This potential is what ultimately became the biggest part of my writing and research process.

What could this be? What can I do with this? These are the questions that potentiality asks. These are the questions I asked myself when I thought about my day, or what I had seen, or what I remembered from childhood. I have a whole document of short lines I'd thought of while going about my day that didn't have a greater scope to fit into yet. I asked myself what I could do with them. I wondered what would happen if I just left them all together, as little unconnected pieces. This then became an essay for the thesis. The result of the experimentation was a

catalogue of fragments that perhaps did not go together, but when read together had an affect like walking down a sidewalk and intentionally stepping on every crack, like breaking your own back. It was this process of asking and then, instead of waiting for some kind of answer, just doing it and taking in the result. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it did not. And both outcomes were good and helpful.

Much of the research I did for this project was reading essays and looking at ways different writers and poets experimented or broke through the typical form template of their genre. I imitated use of white space or numbering, adding my own twists on things, building on and going beyond what had been done already, just to see what would happen, what it could do. As for the actual content, much of what I did was looking at bugs, butterflies, old pictures, trees, the rain, my dog. I identified plants while I walked and looked for constellations in the sky. I remembered the way I used to be and noticed the ways I have changed and all of these things became knowledge to be used for my thesis. What would happen if I began cataloguing different things in my apartments? What would happen if I wrote advice for life that was maybe depressing but funny? I asked questions, and made up my own answers.

Through the last two semesters, *A Catalogue of Wings* became so much more than the words in this document. It became a way of existing for me, an art form. I took the butterflies I collected and catalogued and ran them through a laminator along with leaves and flowers and these pieces which I hung on my walls are as much a part of this thesis as the essays within. I was able to connect with life and my world to discover and render newness. I let myself transform with the project, and I enjoyed the process of becoming while I was creating.

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CREATIVE ARTIFACT

Catalogue of Wings

Painted Lady Butterfly found on my grandmother's lawn in Bryan, Tx August 2018.

Common Buckeye Butterfly found on a window sill in Tyler, Tx April 2019.

Monarch Butterfly found on the sidewalk in College Station, Tx April 2019.

Gulf Fritillary Butterfly found in a hotel parking lot while on a work trip in Mexia, Tx May 2019. Both wings intact.

Gulf Fritillary Butterfly found in the front grill of a truck at my apartment complex in College Station, Tx September 2019. Only one usable wing, second one crushed.

Cicada wing found in the bark of a tree trunk at my apartment complex in College Station, Tx September 2019. One wing found: clear, with minor damage.

Dragonfly Wing found on my parent's porch in Flint, Tx October 2019. Only one wing found: clear with one black spot.

Katydid found half- dead on the sidewalk in College Station, Tx December 2019. Both wings intact: green and veined, resembling a leaf.

Dragonfly Wing misplaced and rediscovered in the pages of a book borrowed from Sara in College Station, Tx March 2020. Wing is clear with brown spot. Minimal damage.

A Love Poem with No Object

Grandmother's white kitchen table sits in front of the window and a similarly white corner cabinet, always set with lush blue placemats like it came straight from Pinterest. In the mornings, she makes me eggs and toast, turkey bacon, coffee, a side of fresh fruit, orange juice. The eggs come from the chickens next door. Grandmother swears that the hens like being held and hugged by her, and that when she visits, they cluck and crouch at her feet. I ask my grandmother how eggs are made and brace for the scolding, her asking me how I could possibly not know. It doesn't come. I don't think I know either, she says instead. She was a biology teacher so I don't feel so bad. Do they have ovaries, I ask. Surely they do, she responds and I see the crinkle between her eyes as she thinks. It is a good thing that smartphones exist so that grandmother and I do not stay stupid. I google it. Yes, eggs come from ovaries, I tell her, explaining the process. We go back to eating. I look at her again. Are squash and zucchini related, I ask her. She doesn't know, but she thinks cucumbers are related somehow. I google it. All zucchini are squash but not all squash are zucchini and technically they are all three fruits. What is the difference between a fruit and vegetable, I ask grandmother. She doesn't know. I google it. Fruit comes from the ovaries of the flowering plant, vegetables are everything else, like the leaves and stems and roots, I tell her. She nods. If fruit comes from an ovary and eggs come from an ovary, I guess that means chickens are a fruit, I say. And in that case, so are we, I add. She shakes her head at me. I finish my breakfast.

Catalogue of the Real

The tears of my parents when I got into college

My black dog's paws that smell like Fritos

When my grandmother tells me that she believes in me

The wind when I'm lonely

The half dried pond in the park by my apartment

When Robin tells me that I make her feel better

My professor when she tells me I have potential

My inability to be content where I am

When I told H- that I would always love them

When I say I am a writer

The bluebonnets at the edge of the forest

The creek I ran barefoot through as a child

The books overflowing from my shelves

The Snow

I want to tell you about the snow. It was December 7th, a Thursday. I walked out the door after getting off from work, stepped out from under the red trimmed roof and felt the flurries so unexpected; I couldn't stop smiling. Snow in Texas. I put Sleeping at Last on the radio in the car to drive home too. It was the only music I felt would be magical enough to hear while the flakes blew across the road like snakes in the desert. It was surreal, I drove slowly home with that gentle voice and the stringed instruments in my ears and the building whiteness in front of me.

I was in my room when Gay came in. The sun had gone down, and the snow had stopped, I thought, so I was laying on my bed with my dog, Nox, reading.

“Gracie, you have to come see outside,” She said.

I hopped off the bed and it creaked, the thump of Nox's little twelve-pound body landing on the carpet behind me. Outside the ground glowed in the moonlight. I had seen snow before. Like that time in Colorado I showed up on my neighbor's doorstep, knee deep in snow and half naked, but that's a story for another time. There was that time it snowed in April while I was camping at Tyler State Park with my family as a kid. We rode our bicycles through it, and mine sounded like a motorcycle because I had taped a playing card against the tire spokes. We sat by the lake and my dad kept getting up to tuck the blankets around us so we wouldn't get too cold. It all felt like another life.

Nox had never seen snow before. He immediately took off into it, up to his belly, which wasn't hard to do with his small frame and short legs. He ran around in circles with Gay's huge border collie, Jethro, biting the ice and shaking his head at the cold. Gay and I laughed and I tried to take a picture but it was too dark and all I have of that silly black dog in his first snow is my

memories and dark pictures, only light and shadow. We dried them off with the ratty maroon porch towel and went back in and told Paul about the snow, sitting at the computer in his office.

“Paul? Did you want to see the snow?” I asked, poking my head through the doorway.

“Oh yeah, I never saw any of that in Alaska.” He chuckled.

“Exactly,” I responded, matching his sarcastic tone.

I went to my room and grabbed a beanie and jacket, slipping a pack of cigarettes in my pocket. I wasn't a smoker per se, but I did enjoy one once in a while, mostly in social settings, and only for the past year or so. I stepped out the heavy front door and took off down the sidewalk through the cul-de-sac. I lit a cigarette and tried to be discreet so my taboo hobby wouldn't be noticed by the neighbors. The last thing I wanted was for one of them to say to Gay, “You know I saw that girl who lives with you smoking!”

Ours was the only house in the neighborhood without Christmas lights. The whole street glowed, lights reflecting the snow, the sky backlit by the moon. I could see everything clearly as I turned the corner, my breath hanging in the air. There was an empty lot down the street, too small for a house and what I liked to call my miniature forest. The snow was deep, covering my boots as I stroked the small trees, touching my fingertips to the glassy sugarberries hanging in clumps among the leaves.

I brought the smoke to my lips again. The pull I took and exhaled felt wrong in the whiteness around me. Like pollution. To the forest in the snow, the forest inside me. I wanted to always be like a tree. This boy I once liked asked me what my favorite thing in all the world was. What I liked, what I loved more than anything or anyone or any feeling or motion. Trees, I told him. Trees are my favorite thing. I wanted to be a forest princess. Or one of the warrior maidens of the mythical goddess, Diana. Yet here I was, poisoning the trees I loved so much. Coating my

body in ash. I dropped it then, into the ice packed around my boots, and swore then and there that it was the last. The last cigarette I would ever have, because I wanted to be pure as tree filtered oxygen, white as snow and just as clean. When I got back to the house I threw the pack in the garbage. I half wanted to take a picture of them, scattered on top of old tissues in the HEB bag. It looked a lot like starting over.

I never told anyone about it. I think the best kind of secrets are the ones that are only about you and the way you changed for the better. My secret is about the snow. About this snow, in Texas, on Park Oak Drive in the little forest in a cul-de-sac, and about how I vowed to never again choke the trees inside me.

Research

1. How ordinary would I seem if I told you my aesthetic is getting high and reading poetry? “How original,” you might say dryly, taking another swallow of your wine.
2. I read a book by a woman who claimed she fell in love with the color blue. I wonder, if someone can be in love with a color, could I be in love with the sun on a cold afternoon in Washington State?
3. Perhaps I only say warmth of the sun because as I write this, the afternoon is chilly and therefore so am I.
4. I was always told to write what I know. My response to this is to learn as much as I possibly can, and then I will know enough to write about. Should I ever need to write a scene in which a character cuts their finger off in a meat slicer, I will know exactly how it would happen and exactly what setting the slicer was on.
5. I believe what I do is research. So, though I make a living slicing meat in a deli, if I write down what I learn, it is as if I am paid for the research and in conclusion, I may respond to inquiries about my profession with, “I am a researcher.” It is purely happenstance that I am researching deli workers and that need not ever be revealed.

6. I am not hiding what I do because I am not ashamed of what I do, only what I don't do. Which is everything I want to. Like painting for example. I am starving to be an artist.

7. I already have attained a hole in the wall apartment, I never have any money, and I spend hours crouched over a typewriter in a fury sweat. All I need now is the production. Of something. Soliloquy or song, but I can't even play piano.

8. I am all I ever talk about, aren't I. I should talk about something else. Maybe the child laughter from next door. The short-haired fairy of a girl blowing dandelion clocks. "I wish to see you soon," she says.

9. I am learning that people in life are temporary so, I ask a lot of questions.

10. I have one week left with a foul-mouthed lesbian from Eastsound. She said I remind her of herself. In the interest of research, I have tried to know everything about her so I might finally know something about me. What I am learning instead is that people find some questions to be much too intrusive, and it turns out, I don't know how to tell.

11. In the dark, the sea looks like the edge of a cliff and I'll drive fast around the bends and remember that the deer are giving birth and wandering with their children spotted and scared but I won't hurt them, or anyone ever again.

12. People come here to start over, for a second chance to be someone else, and a few years later they call it Rikers, a rock like Alcatraz they're confined to. And though the ocean may seem like walls, the pace is slow and the people don't care where you're from or what you wear.

13. I don't know if this skin I'm trying on I'll keep, though it feels like the real one to me, and everyone on this island thinks so too. But this is one little dock surrounded by ocean and the smell of the brine keeps rattling my mind and telling me to stay here, stay here and be this person.

14. The bathroom this side of the ferry terminal smells like stale cigarettes. There's fog on the horizon and the only evidence of the ships is found in the echoing of their deep bellowing horns, warning the surrounding boats of their existence, and me of the inevitable return.

Catalogue of the Fake

The bouquet of flowers I carried down the aisle at Rebecca's wedding in a vase on my coffee table

When people in passing ask how I am

My childhood best friend saying she missed me when we ran into each other at the theatre

The purple flower stuck in "Grimm's Fairytales" on my bookshelf

When colleagues say *don't be a stranger* as I leave my job for the last time

The hollow book on my night table where I hid the love poems I scribbled for S- on orange sticky notes

When A- held me in her arms and said she loved me

The cluster of pink flowers in the vase on my kitchen wall

People telling me I should be proud of who I am*

J-, when he said we would always be friends

When my fourth-grade teacher said I was delight to have in class

When I say I am a writer

When C- said he would never let me get lost in the chaos

*included in this list because the people in question do not have all the facts

If This is Calm, Bring on the Storm

I am susceptible –
given over to home

each day
I wake
the same

I have always been a harbinger –
of something

a bringer
the fire
it rises

If life were an illusion,
would I have more control?

Or if it wasn't?

I hide from supposed to's by lying in the sun
This need to is greater

If I had wings would they be see-through
If from each of my steps in the grass
a flower grew

would they be
weeds
to you

I want to tell all the world:
Be silent

Watch the spiders string their webs
like hammocks
between blades of grass

Flush against the clover
There are aphids in my hair

The insects can find
warmth against my skin

if they want

But they should know
that when it's dark
I cannot see.

The Bird and the Amazon

Once upon a time, there was a young woman who had a magical mirror in her apartment. A mirror that could show the gazer their reflection beyond reality. The day came when the woman worked up the courage to peer into the mirror, digging it out of the closet and throwing the sheet off, she stood before it anxiously.

For a moment, nothing happened. She simply breathed and stared, waiting. Eventually, as she watched, her skin began to bubble like goose-flesh. And with further breaths, the bubbles broke open and from each one sprouted a feather.

One-by-one the chill bumps transformed her into a fledgling, half feathered and strange, and would have released her complete as a great bird.

If only she had not been afraid.

With a gasp, she threw the sheet back over the mirror and shoved it into the closet, never to look into again. *What would become of me as a bird, she thought. At the mercy of the wind, unguided and unguarded, the whole world in my grasp - no.* So she stayed on the ground, tethered, married, had children, and though she warned her daughter about the mirror and its dangers, she forgot about the bird she could have been, and the freedom she was too scared to obtain.

Years later, the woman's daughter found the mirror, and being curious as she was, decided to look through it. The daughter prepared herself, took her time, believing in the transformative power of the mirror and understanding the gravity of what it might mean. When she was ready, the daughter stood naked before the mirror and waited and breathed. For a moment, nothing happened. She watched her shoulders rise and fall until they began to flicker, to ripple with each inhale. Her eyes got wide as with each inhale her body grew larger, arms

becoming muscled, skin tightening. Her torso became hard and toned, shoulders broad, strength filling her quickly now. But the daughter became afraid, turning from the mirror, exhaling fully, she felt her body return to normal. *What would happen if I became that*, she thought. *If I were strong as an Amazon I may hurt the ones that I love. Perhaps it is sufficient to know what I could be.* And so, she put the mirror away, though continuously aware of the potential as it calls to her, *come be who you were meant to be. It is already there inside of you.*

Catalogue of Live Things

Two bamboo shoots on the table beside the couch

Daisies purchased from Aldi in a vase on the coffee table

The ivy plant given to me by a parent from the daycare I worked at on the table in the kitchen

The monarch that got out, fluttering around, perhaps looking for the exit

Five succulents on the planter stand by the chair in the corner

The katydid laying her eggs in the old fish tank on the desk

Three flowering plants hanging from the porch railing

A mosquito-eater that got inside somehow, repeatedly flying into the corner where the walls meet the ceiling

The little black dog curled up against my stomach while I sleep

Me, every day I wake again

Intermission

Early mornings sound better when they begin with the high-pitched whine of coffee beans grinding, set to brewing on the stove in a home that feels like love. Robin brings me coffee filled with her signature two heaping scoops of sugar in a glass mug. Her six children wake up incrementally one by one to sit down in the room with the sun through the windows, with their parents, with me and in this between I feel at home. Belonging is an occupation of being more than a state of feeling and I occupy this space with her and her husband who tolerates my dog though firmly stating that dogs are not cute (on this opinion only I stand that he is wrong).

Robin says something is waking in her and I will coax that thing out of hiding while walking through the cemetery, faces towards the sun, photosynthesis. If I were not human I would want to be a tree, I tell her. But what if you are chopped down, she asks. What if I am felled every day already even now as I stand on two legs?

Perhaps she and I can rewrite together our high school years, which were so small a fraction of our lives but so looming a beginning, change and control. So now in our adulthood we hide in the woodshed with canned margaritas and sneak around town to find empty parking lots to smoke in where our parents won't catch us. We'll discover the floaters in our eyes and reach towards the sky as if to take hold of them; I will take hold of her.

In the darkness of a New Year's Eve I can see her silhouette as the lights along the highway outline her face, every edge, nose, lips, and even her voice. I look for traces of myself in my friend, a foreshadowing of the what could be, stability, home, contentment. She makes this world bearable and though my being feels no fear or hesitation regarding death, I am at rest in living with her head on my shoulder and the light of a backyard campfire.

In her, I can feel a constant, though I am not static, but growing up into myself, integrating. Who am I, you might ask, and I'll tell you that this question does not matter because I will be someone new tomorrow and I am looking forward to being her. For the first time, I am not afraid of becoming. Of realizing that the one question that drowned me was inconsequential. I am whatever I want to be. And right now, I want to be here under a weighted blanket in the dark waiting for the grind of coffee in the cold morning intermission between the end and beginning of a new time, new year, new meditation. I will stretch off the couch cushions and be handed my cup and watch them hold each other in the spotlight of dust motes floating around our heads. I will say good morning, and it will be true.

Catalogue of Dead Things

In a small glass jar, one red leaf, one mouse skull, one gray human hair

In a square glass jar, one dandelion clock

Upon the bookshelf, two bird feathers, a leaf Robin found in Austin, and a seed pod from a tree by the pond in the park

Wrapped in a paper towel, placed into a copper acorn, one mammal skull

Hung on the wall beside a calendar, a bouquet of dried flowers from a best friend's wedding

Also hung on different walls and strung with beads, two twigs of a smooth red madrona tree from Orcas Island, and two cactus skeletons from New Mexico

On the coffee table, an assortment of acorns

Upon the desk, beneath the lamp, five butterfly carcasses

Laminated and hung upon the wall, sixteen pressed flowers, three leaves, and two dragonfly wings

Tucked into a handmade flower press, two leaves, and two katydid wings

In a Tupperware in the cabinet, ten leaves, two dragonfly wings, and two flowers

On the window sill, a honeybee curled in on itself as we all do

Is This an Accident or Art? Neither; it's Evidence.

There are shards of ceramic littering the top of a parking garage downtown. Remnants of a hand-hewn inkwell sculpted and glazed by long pale fingers. He gave it to me one day saying, It's imperfect, and asking, did I want it, because he didn't.

The Fair Plaza Garage is where my friends and I go in the dead of darkness when we are eaten up. The inkwell was not the only thing broken upon the cement. Recently a man threw himself from up there, he must have seen the levels go by in a blur; empty headlights, flashes of color then nothing.

I like to sit on the edge and look down; the brewing company, the scarce skyscrapers. In winter the sides of the buildings are hung with red and green lights like ivy. The coffee shop where he and I sat with paper and calligraphy pens; I tied the balloons to the back of my chair so they wouldn't float away prematurely. They got caught in the trees anyway, and what happened to our letters? I remember the amphitheater in the park. They hadn't knocked it down yet to replace it with something newer.

There's a fountain now too, and I see kids playing in it when I drive by, which is good because otherwise I'd be scanning the trees for deflated balloons' strings. I need to keep my eyes on the road or I might repeat that night, two days after my birthday when Rebecca and I drove home and she forgot to yield. There's a picture of us in the waiting room with braces around our necks digging into bruises beginning to form, hands held together on the arm rests, faces in a laugh but I don't remember what was so funny. I just remember closing my eyes the next hundred nights and seeing the headlights and the smell of gunpowder, and the feeling that all my ribs had been broken. Can't catch a breath. A year later, she told me she didn't want to look over, thinking she'd killed me, but it was unfounded fear. That's not what dying feels like.

Catalogue of Half Formulated Fragments

Today I let my fear control me. I think you would have been proud.

Whatever is a surrender word

I imagine I am walking the edge
of a cliff, arms outstretched
a strong wind bubbles my skin
my hair stands on end
and I imagine you are the wind

This is a story about no one and nothing -- for that is the hardest thing to be.

All that have nailed upon these walls —
a shrine to all that I have loved — all but you.

I look at myself and I am concave. Shaped like a boat or curling leaf, like I could float upon the water or even on the wind.

I no longer miss any of the people I used to love, but I know when I leave here, that will no longer be true.

We poison our minds along with our bodies like life is some kind of game.
But why shouldn't life be a game?

Much self-harm is first degree. Premeditated and planned. I think about that as I pull the ring off my finger and clench my fist, elbow up, fist to wall.

I don't want the however short breadth of my life reduced to the words: loving friend and daughter etched into stone.

Today I am too tired to fight. The grass outside my door leaves stinging spots on my skin and I am not used to being barred this way. When I spoke to you this afternoon, you said you wouldn't watch a serial where someone like me was the main character. I suppose I will learn how to be okay playing a minor role in your story.

If I must be baptized, may it be in sunlight

Don't ask me what it means — tell me how it feels.

We used to compare renderings to the original. Now we say the sunset looks like a painting.

No one shamed the sun when it came out. So why do they shame us? Our light is hardly bright enough to burn.

The only difference between a heroine and heroin is an e.

There's a bedroom in a house on Creston street that reminds me of loneliness.

For someone who believes in absolute truth,
you kissed me like no one could tell you what to do.

There was a man at the bus stop today who smelled like fruit loops.

If I am riding inside of something, and that something is seen in reflection, is that reflection my own?

The bluebonnets tell me where they are going to grow. Each time I set out in search of them, I need only close my eyes and walk. There they are.

Fire is a winter sport
Summer, a young man's game.

Plant me in the ground and I'll become an oak tree.

A Catalogue of Catalogues

Catalogue of Wings

Catalogue of Dead Things

Catalogue of the Fake

Catalogue of the Real

Catalogue of Live Things

Catalogue of Half Formulated Fragments

Catalogue of Catalogues

How to stave off the inevitable entropy of existence

1. Dance to Barbara Streisand in the light of a full autumn moon. Don't stop just because cars drive by.
2. Hang glow-in-the-dark stars above your bed and pretend the light doesn't bother you when you're trying to sleep.
3. When you make art and hate it, set it on a pond and light it on fire. If it burns too quickly for satisfaction, do it again.
4. Mindlessly eat popsicles while bingeing reruns of project runway on a pullout couch at your grandmother's house.
5. Ask your pet how his/her day was. Actually listen to the answer.
6. Fall asleep in the back seat of your car while reading *1984* by George Orwell.
7. Stare at an ant hill for a while. Put your hand on it if you just want to feel something for once.
8. Text your friend while sober that you think you'll never amount to anything and then yell at her when she tries to cheer you up.
9. Make a stupid face and ask your mother if she would still love you if you looked like this.
10. Refuse to cry for six months and repeatedly tell yourself that you are Vulcan and feel nothing.
11. Run until you puke and when your roommate asks why you are sitting on the floor, tell them you were just looking for a trash bag.
12. Buy socks with avocados on them. Wear them knee high with shorts and pretend you don't care when your dad tells you how unique you are.

13. Don't ever tell anyone you miss them. Just post pictures of the sky in full pink and orange sunset on social media with a caption that quotes a song about missing someone but don't tell them who it's about.
14. Dance in the field behind your house and pretend you're in a music video and are pretty. Don't film it or you'll shatter the illusion.
15. Collect dead things and give them to people hoping to buy their love.
16. Play squash by yourself while screaming profanities and telling yourself that you're a shark and if you stop swimming you'll die.
17. Tell your friend that you're happy they are in a better place now but secretly resent it because it means they won't get drunk and make out with you anymore.
18. Try to think of something clever to write in the sweat on the windows but end up just writing "help" because it is the only word in your mind.
19. Wrap yourself in a blanket and lay in the grass. Get mad when every person that passes stops and asks if you're okay when you're just trying to take a freaking nap.
20. Kneel on the ground to look at a dead bird. Realize after that you knelt in mud, and now have to explain to your coworkers why your jeans are brown.
21. Tell people you're a writer. Never actually write anything. Tell your mom *I know* when she says you actually need to write to be a writer.
22. Sit on a blanket outside in the sun while sharing cold tater-tots with your dog.
23. Don't

