

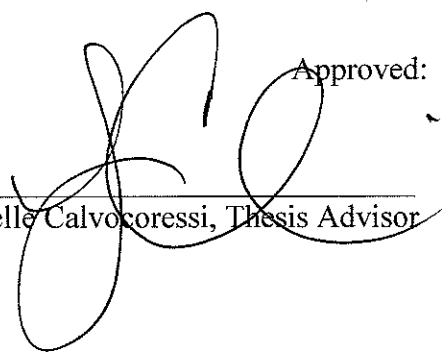
The Experiment Station of Ordinary Stakes

By

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Approved:



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Rummage

Young in the jumpseat, I turned to my sister and said she—our mother in the driveway shucking paint from a cupboard—has loved me the longest. Sandpaper withers under her palm. I smell like lap, a fistful of polyurethane rags. Girls, this is not furniture, it's a *piece*. Your best bet is the auction house dumpster. I'm seventeen and she tells my girlfriend to haul a table off the curb. Instinct: what sturdy wood brews under paint. Rachel asks, isn't this stealing? but is more afraid of my mother. A raccoon's happy jowls, milkwood frothing onto its paws. The end table sits in our garage for two days. Rachel calls me distressed—I drove by that house and there's a sign: PLEASE BRING BACK OUR TABLE. My mother and I dress in black, drive at night, return it. Inheritance: a room of other people's furniture, moving south to north to a half-south state, that postage stamp of soil. It's already in the mail. In the jumpseat, watching a geography like my mother's. She wants to know who leaves furniture at the curb and expects it to stay. Refinishing. I took her old full-length mirror, where I practice watching my body fill a room twice.

Learning the Storm

I was not there,
I know
people swam.

Floated. Fled.
St. John slithered
into Pontchartrain.

Tasting
the Gulf tide,
copperheads said
it is good and salty,
tastes like water
and food

they said.
Like fish
whose thin bones
whip between teeth.

I hung onto
the pool wall
of the downtown Y
Practicing.

Guzzling air,
a snort
of chlorine in the nose.

Girlhood I

Math teacher hair
falling
to her *bottom*—
a sterile word,
butt
is crude
and
mother says *fanny*.
Are there alternatives
we don't know
yet? Uncertain
as space
between tiny breasts
in which cups of underwire
foam.

Upstate

Six hours northwest,
south of Lake Ontario,
and on the Erie Canal
is also New York,
six hours northwest
of jazz-square ash,
a man plummeting
groundwards into steel.
The girl taking attendance
saw the main office TVs
and returned to third grade
testifying to fire, the planes
crashing as if Legos, and
the bus loop filled early,
parents packing the lobby
talked of lighting candles.
I do not remember candles,
only making cookies
in my friend's kitchen—
we stuck two butters
vertical into the sugar flour
and karate-chopped them
down one at a time. We
poured chocolate chips,
called them bodies, turning it
all over with a wooden spoon.
The butter-puckered wrappers
on the stove, her nanny in
tye-dye, watching, asking us
to turn off the oven.

Hunt

whoop the mosquito truck
turned right.

the leftover street
air is deet and

sirens nip, lobes blank for what

they tucked behind the ear

has long fallen.

from ritual inspection

from the hills. moving water on the window

hearts run down condensate,

assemble

and labor.

Archive

One charred nucleus vibrates
up the calf,

scalloped edges, the shavings
pile up.

My desire to flip tables cries
strongest here.

Change came like foxes
out of mist,

a billion refreshed comets
on silent earth.

Most of us meander in the craters,
some listen.

Please adjust the output:
yawns produce

feedback. Save tape for
the fire,

after all, I will bring
kindling.

Roommate I

He doesn't die
on the floor like the summer
cockroaches that hightail
under the kitchen vinyl,
their thin rinds popping off
from feet,
from chemicals, the bug lady's,
whom I call while he's in hospice.

He begins his dying in his parent's
guest room.
Aunt baking pies,
tiny dog squealing. His mother holds
the dog in her arms. Someone asks
if he's all right.
Someone asks if I'm all right;
I ask for rent checks.

The Foreign Body, Outside

Petals fuse sharp
beneath the aged women,

who have voyaged
outside and onto benches.

Like everywhere,
anywhere is a place
where other people live.

Listen to the conch
uncoil its tale in echoes.

It runs in circles.

Elvis at Three is an Angel to Me

Nailed to the wall

cowboy sky, hat lipped,

eyelashes flying spiders. He is an angel to me

in the hands of his mother, hands tucked
to the slim jean pocket

is an angel to me

sliding from the shower door. Sopping
nape,

towel wrapped. Pistol in holster.

is an angel to me. Diet Coke

at the counter. Him dancing.

Plot 14

squat glass please
touch
no
ask my daughter's body
you can't.
it's leftovers says mom.
then why did you sing
when vertebrae burned
up my log.
when it started to burn
did you watch
or bring water.
grasshopper away
did you mom
think we couldn't
share one tent
mom do you think
i didn't love it
how you didn't
hesitate before spooning
my fever
did you not think
i'd fit you.
hours and hours
you rubbed
i did.
i made you
beside me.

Now Go and Love Some More

They tasted open to me. Her fingers tasted open
as chopped lemons; me squeezing the juice into the cuts
until she says stop, it's okay. Fill me with you instead.
And I say, awesome, I'm glad you've agreed.
Time for me. Then all the smoke blows: I
every destination of direction.

And she escapes like she wants.
What was left flits; from above the cold pit
she took the gloaming with her
in her tired fingers. Dangling, round my neck,
they even sound sour. The rind
smacking in my acid mouth.

Instead the Sign Reads *You Are Her*

Back up.

The woman I said I was

is her.

Spitting up
water to windows;

a punch lands
in glass.

The car, it crawls.

What chair would I throw—

mine,
the couple's who chuckle
over lunch?

the one I sit in.

Back up, back up.

The ship
froths its sea-bath white.

Rudder in, sail up.
That's not the same water.

You are here

you are her.

Backed up, turned around

safe on a Mississippi
bridge.

Darker, sinking, bobbing.

First infrastructure of fear:

the body that does both

wants both,
can both.

I read there is sadness.

The joy I feel

does not tattoo the water

sun cast upon

the bridge of my foot,

moves across—

so high above.

Roommate II

The anchor terrifies me:
its shaft sprouts four barbed
hooks I imagine in my foot.

Andrew, what can I do
with this body bound
to water, besides tread?

They say when you swam
your shoulders broadened
and the cap mussed your hair.

It's seven miles long—the island
where seven hundred live and
pray in one hundred white churches,

where your hot death
declares itself at seven am
in vineyard three,

that nubby, lost cause
weed yard
crackling with snakes.

Down the road, a donkey strains,
tethered so he doesn't rape
the old mule or mama goat.

The farmer—he has an ego,
an Ohio accent, and friends
who watch us women

yank feet and feet of hose
for twice-daily watering.
Cats scream at the compost.

I hate the cats.
You don't have a cat in your body
that doesn't want a lamb shank.

You don't have
a current in your body.
An exhaust pipe in your body.

I don't have anyone in my body.
I don't have a brick road
that's not flooded out.

I don't have land
in your body. It rains
in a pleasant, inside way.

When your body scatters
across land and water,
muddy us; us love us

the worst.
Light water
living.

On the rocks, a fisherman
wallops an octopus;
tentacles fill his hands.

The octopus is tiny.
I can't justify
this extravagant trip.

Justice confuses me
but I am still speaking.
Tonight, the year of your leaving,

that fisherman will slice
his catch, grill it, feed
me a disc of flesh.

Women's Work

And the Schwinn between your thighs is like a blunt sickle coming down on weeds.
Coasting. Down the hill smoother than men who swagger—fingering their blades. You
hope it hurts. A mother's live milkweed cranks in circles. Snaps itself. For fairyhouses,
you tended this loam. Poach everything. Parch nothing. Pick a weapon and I'll sharpen it.

Girlhood II

red rover red rover

ready – set – go – her? through us?

their pretzeled arms. he's not snapping.

run faster come on, run on through. will you look back?
will you?

“Erasure may well be the closest poetry in English has gotten to the role of the state.”
—Solmaz Sharif



SPOTS ON TOMATOES CAUSED BY THE EARLY BLIGHT.

DISEASES OF THE TOMATO IN LOUISIANA

BY

C. W. EDGERTON, Plant Pathologist,

AND

C. C. MORELAND, Ass't Plant Pathologist.

BATON ROUGE
RAMIREZ-JONES PRINTING COMPANY
1914

*Reclaim; scoop out a space,
take that space up— one politic.*

I cross-out/ black-out/strike-out

~~come-out~~ am produced.

*Iron rusted basin and no blade I've ever seen—C.C.'s push lawn-mower leans against our magnolia tree. My mother points to the
hole in the center, that's where my granddaddy put a tomato pot, he'd drive it across the yard to follow the sun and the shade, she
says. The lawnmower followed us too.*

Our family of four moved up and down America; now we live on CC's old block. Lydia Street.

*In my twenty-first year, I google C.C. Moreland and find a digitized copy of "Diseases of the Tomato in Louisiana." I read it and
then decide to erase both the words and the blank space my erasure creates. I erase blank space because I don't want this piece to
dominate. Is that an aesthetic decision or a political one?*

stalled, people are dependent

do not
know something is wrong

the State

and the Southern blight do
damage.

be well.

TABLE 1

~~TABLE 1. DISEASES OF THE~~
~~TABLE 1. DISEASES OF THE~~

Plant	Part	Appearance	Remarks	Remarks
Plant	Part	Outside normal, inside normal	Turn yellow and die.	Plant
Plant	Part	Plant sunken spots	Plant spots, Plant spots	black circular rotten spots.
Plant	Normal.	Normal.	Normal.	Plant pink Plant spots - soaked areas, especially near the end.
Plant	Plant or Plant normal.	Plant	Plant Plant	Plant
Plant	Plant	Covered Plant of Plant ground white mold.	Plant Plant	Plant
Plant	Plant	Plant	Plant	Plant spots, with pink or black Plant
Plant to blight.	Plant	Plant Plant	Rapid wilting.	Normal.
Plant curl.	Plant	Normal.	Curling up Plant	Normal.

the Experiment Station

of ordinary

stakes,

C.C., age ninety, putters out back while the men who trim his pecan trees stand on ladders. He's particular about the trees and would prune himself, if his body allowed. When the branch knocks his head, he's standing near the bird feeder. It's full of rainwater and smells like August; C.C. is thinking of cleaning out the leaves. After the branch knocks his head, he falls back onto the cement basin. Freed blood, freed from channels whirring in muddled circles of memory, saturates the insides of his skull. A flock of gardeners leap off their ladders.

cut across with a knife

wholly colored

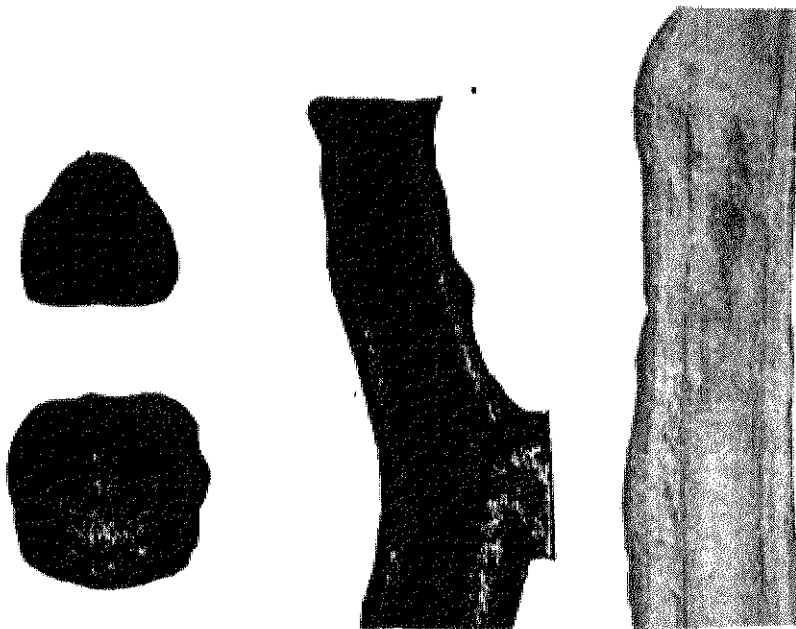
be it a longitudinal extend
and damage

The First Coco:

*Dominique Baldondie Coco Jr,
1785-1864*

He died in Cocoville, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana.

*The plantation owner, the slave owner, he died the wealthiest man in his parish; he was worth
7.1 million dollars and left a set of symmetrical syllables*



parent

grows up through

grows out

the fruiting bodies

Grandfather Coco married Grandmother Moreland in 1954.

By the scattering

men or animals that walk through the field and brush against
the diseased plants.

By planting seed

By planting the seed in infected seed beds

in the State.

They say:

*Already, I see your name in lights. On stage or on a book, in the mouths of the other blooded. He asks Co/co Wild/er will
you turn wild
for me? I like kissing, she says, you, secret, softly. I love this wild, wild name.*

ask why

he set out

to control this disease, we must

become infected

(3) the growing of resistant

varieties

can be accomplished

will stand

in

their germinative power.

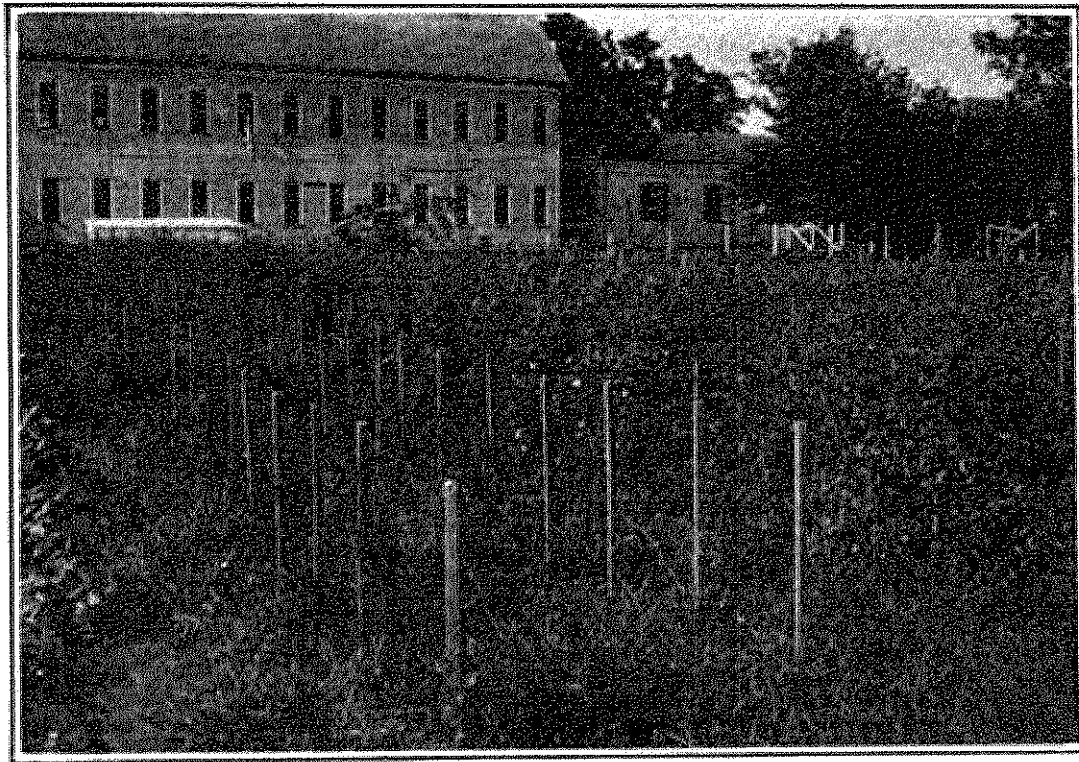
*When people spell it "CoCo" my whiteness is questioned and gets defensive. Skittish like the dog I say won't bite anyone
but whose retractable leash is faulty. I'm untangling the leash;
who is walking who at night.*

without hurt
but

this corrosive

sublimate is poisonous. It will hurt the hands
 Porcelain vessels should be used

we should start in right.



lateness

bad

bright

circular and

depressed

the fruit

the fruit

badly spotted

when the fruit becomes spotted it is

entire

dance

over

winter.

When I fall—rushing, late to history class—I fall forwards. White light flashes, wetly. A student sees it and keeps walking. A grown woman finds me curled up on the ground. She presses her scarf against my forehead. It's going to be okay, she says, taking my hand, it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. This, right now, is the worst part. A male EMT arrives and tells me not to be afraid. I am.

Control

sterilized

in a way that means something.

penetrate them.

hearted

copper

metallic.

It will all go

in twenty-four hours

slack.

as long as they are kept separate. solutions keep indefinitely

Red, blue and white.

*Concussed. My sister and best friend, they see my skull and some kind of bone-love
joy I don't want back.
They watch as she zips my muscle up & stitches my skin together. I try and remember, in the tub that evening, watching bubbles
melt on my stomach like loose opals into wool.*

One man can

pump

strain

nozzle.

get out

clog up the

expose
strike
stunted

velvet

Iron

as free as

land freed

not attacked

free land

white mold

is

the falling

death

is sometimes hard to stop.

Self-Deliverance

My mother wants a hood; the clear kind; gallon zip
locks stuffed in the freezer filled with rice, etoufee.
The young elders make arrangements at dinner:
one cousin's sunset cruise ends in a shark swim. She calls
the hemlock society in session & passes the wine. The hood

thrills Mother. *I want a hood!* Says it like it's a funky
purse. A mail order helium hood is standard
but they come in nitrate too. Nobel gas flutes;
within two to five seconds you'll be unconscious,
three more & they'll remember you on window shrines.

Naturally, memory will undo us.
My father frames nothing and outside the breakfast
bar window, squirrels plunder the bird feeder. The jay
arrives and departs in hunger. She stares at you through
glass, pecking at it. She started with an empty nest.

Tiger Truck Stop

Sorry. I looked
(hard, not long)
inside your cage.

At the nativity and your muzzle.
On I-10, the nine-pm cars
barrel. As for us beside the gas pump,

a strand of tree lights blink
us blue or green or red
and another car exits and

you are still orange.
Do you like the smell of petroleum?
I'm sorry for keeping you.

Pacing, you snuggle
next to plastic Mary.
Plastic Mary adores

plastic Joseph, whose small hand
pats the plastic lamb.
I know you know:

unlike them, I am edible,
unlike them, you are too.
A better person doesn't

stop to look. You're
tired, divine liberation
isn't in the cards.

The infant sleeps. I leave
my wild stripes to you
in the placid parking lot.

Intimacy is a Marinade

prepared in the hatchback
chanting
to herself on a country road
two tricycles & a scooter wait
Free Please Take
Pictures
a woman pulls over
and touches the fluttering
ribbons
crows flock
to squashed possums

to the small heart
on my childhood street
after the snow melt
the Orthodox emerged mothers
I touched the wigs on one's dresser
I touched the humming bird
trapped
inside the screen porch
I carried its emerald nut body
to the dry dam
the fractured side
and I released her

Elegy

Razan, I also love breakfast food:
 potato edges all shredded
 up and burnt crisp in the pan;
 slathered in ketchup, though
 my bougie self judges the dip; grits,

grits are good too. I made some this morning.
 Your friend is so brave; she stands
 and tells us French toast is your favorite.
 I hear you also loved veggie omelets and design.
 I don't know about omelets—the egg is spongy

and its makers insist on green bell peppers
 and I'm not a fan. French toast though,
 I'm with you there. My mother calls it *pain perdu*
 but pronounces it the Cajun way: *pan pan du*.
 How does your mother sound when she says it?

that egg soaked old bread? your name? The genius
 of French toast is its elegant use of leftovers; the rump
 of stale bread floats in a puddle of milk and eggs.
 Cinnamon and nutmeg pock the mix. My grand
 says grits are a love pat for your tummy;

my late grandfather melted cheese on pancakes.
 I have more to say (and will) on the matter of breakfast.
 I don't think your dying was victory.
 I think you should be alive,
 eating breakfast this Saturday morning.

Your brother-in-law's friend asked me to please forgive
 you for however you may have wronged me:
 I am sorry for talking about myself in your elegy,
 for witnessing—not understanding—how faith comforts,
 for the time it'll take for me to forgive us both.

Transitions, Abundance

So many repressions
entire
ly
wedged in the nail's gully.

Let's sit, come
together.

Come, rest your mad leg
on mine.
How it has shaken,

will shake rooms to
ovation
into the black-eyed wind.
Leaping, leaping.

Emotionally Available

A cast iron skillet—I would adore
you like one, left out

for daily tortilla warming,
compressing the burner

into the stove. Ask me for a wash,
to bake at three-seventy-five,

I'll wet with glugs of olive oil.
Fill you with sweet potato hash,

carry us outside as cricket-lust
looms from mossed up patio,

swarm that sound. Ask do I want it back,
what do I want to do. Lord, I hope

you eat meat.
Most of you do not.

The Neighbor

Did you see how the ferns grow on it? I have.

Jamie fingers the ferns that
forest the bow; his orange cap
is beautiful—

people from all over come

to look at it.

I push leaf slivers around with my foot
and my dog dances.

He smiles at us, I let the dog
go to him,

push his snout on the fly
his barrel yellow body falling,
pushing back at jeans
with deadweight affection.
Jamie rubs, thumps him in a way

he likes and the dog burrows in.
This man knows how to pet a dog.
We, speckled under the canopy,
buckled and broken
roots horizontal and coming

up thrust skywards. A slow twist
in space
the roots, the branches.
I tell him my name,
he says it back to me.

Mississippi Camp

You stir baked beans with a shallow spoon,
tapping dents on the rim.

The yellow jacket
in the breeze traces
your neck and shoulder,
flies towards the pig

which you strung up like target practice,
snout cocked left
and shut— I taste pork wire,
smoking into the hair it binds
and the children.

The children poke at it with sticks.

You speak of stomping grounds,
my shade melted onto oak roots,

yellow caution tape whispering
for the wandering hound's
muzzle to uncover.

Bought me,
deeded me.

In your memory, I smell like driving.
In my memory, you sell me.
That is how you forget the name

of the daughter who touches
her hands to your veins
and feels their bubbling.

Violet

lay/lie
these whimper-caught birds
out in open sound

the cat dies down,
down into its bed
don't you remember.

Waste Facility

Condoms, fish, I saw
your world glued shut with shit.
The forklift raking muck and pulling

me out. Fingers curled in a ring,
you looked upon with tenderness
and flushed me.

I am good place to be.
A man in a neon vest picks me out
and puts me in the ground. You get

thick with milk and hope for Monday,
when you'll gather in your hips
another belly button.

Notes

I was able to write “The Experiment Station of Ordinary Stakes” through the love and support of my family, friends, and the 2014-2015 UNC-Chapel Hill Honors Poetry class advised by Gabrielle Calvocoressi. I am so grateful for all y’all.

“Roommate I” and “Roommate II” are for Andrew Crabtree.

“Elvis at Three is an Angel to Me” is an ekphrasis of a Howard Finster painting, “ELVIS AT 3 IS AN ANGEL TO ME.”

“Now Go and Love Some More” takes its name from Hal Ashby’s 1971 film *Harold and Maude*.

Diseases of the Tomato in Louisiana is part lyric essay, part erasure of a 1914 article of the same title co-written by C.W. Edgerton and C.C. Moreland. The source document was originally published in *The Bulletin of the Agricultural Experiment Station of Louisiana State University and A&M College*. I also quote Solmaz Sharif’s 2013 piece “The Nearly Transitive Properties of the Political and the Poetical: Erasure” which can be found at thevolta.org. Credit is due to Fay Moreland, Jean Coco, and Alice Wilder, from whom I borrowed collective research and memories to write this piece in progress. Thank you also to the two women, whose names I don’t know, who took care of me when I fell; thank you to Blanche Brown, for wiping blood off my face with such glee. In return, I promise to alert you to all future lipstick smudges.

“Elegy” is for Razan Abu-Salha. She was an undergraduate student at North Carolina State University. Razan, her sister Yusor Abu-Salha, and her sister’s husband, Deah Barakat, were murdered in Chapel Hill, NC in February of 2015 in what is widely considered a white supremacist and anti-Muslim hate-crime. At a vigil on UNC-Chapel Hill’s campus, Razan’s family and friends referred to the trio as “Our Three Winners.” As devout Muslims, they “won” by returning to Allah in Paradise.