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Walnutry

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for the summer at me, the yield from
digging holes and tying strings,
lugging hampers in the mud with heat rash,
stings and blisters. In my room I'd sit
with dirty feet and sweat-ripe skin
on the clean sheets and unwad the damp bills
to press in stacks like pages of a ledger
of the hot days, the green and gray ink
more lasting than sunburn or callouses,
and telling of my labor with a one-eyed
lit pyramid. I collated
and banded the leaves in bundles
and counted out the coins like next year's
seeds into the old tobacco pouch.
That consecrated metal was an abstract
drawn off the soil and sweat and
cast into a jewelry of value.
I meant those struck emblems to act
as compact fuel, like nuclear pellets,
to power my long excursion out of the sun
and beyond the ridges, and put
them all in a paper box above the closet
door to trade later, the young summers
become signs to be translated
again into paper, ink and paper,
in the cool timeless leisure I saw
while washing my feet on the back steps
and spitting melon seeds
into the cricket haunted dark.

Walnutry / Robert Morgan

When walnuts grew in stands like oak
or hickory in some mountain coves
and the timber market lay
over trails and feisty creeks,
some cut their big nut groves the same
as pine, and sawed out planks for

porches, barns, even hogpens.
With never stain nor varnish they
took the weather for a century,
growing stronger, like cement.
The seasoning took twenty years.
They didn't need the meat as
long as there were chestnuts.
Where the cows had rubbed
Their stalls shone like mirrors.

Rainy Sundays in late fall my father
took the egg basket out to the walnut
in the chicken lot and gathered
half a bushel. The hull ink
tanned his palms.
Inside he set them on the hearth
and peeled the sooty rinds off
into the fire. They
censed the house with raw
fumes. He sat there all afternoon
on the warm rock cracking with
his mason's hammer, holding the shells
on end so they split clean,
working careful as a sculptor
to get the little figures of meat
intact from their molds,
and dealt the pieces to Sister
and me for hours while rain
flared on the windows and burst in the fire
compacting brighter on the diet
of shells. That night I'd throw up
the oily seeds gluttoned all evening,
and remember again the ground
under the big walnut
purged bare by the drip
and dissolution of
the tree's powerful bile.