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Putting up Beans

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PUTTING UP BEANS

My cotton covered lap aproned for canning,
summers ago, I snapped green beans for an old lady.
Green beans far from French-styled,
not even French Canadian,
more Huron I suppose, Tsalagi on the southern side.
Holding hard with indexes, thumbs, double-handed
popping apart plump green strings
fresh from leafy hills in the fields.
Bristling with bees and dirt wasps.
Slightly rubbery, slightly sweet
enough bushel baskets to put away winter hunger
for about another year.

I remember the first time I canned in the barns,
tobacco barn burners gassed up blue,
I filled four steel washtubs with seventy pint jars each—
forty if they were quart sized Masons.
The barn itself layered in rafters
for hanging sticks
filled with great leaves of tobacco, green as beans.
Though soon to be gold and brown cured.
Now nowhere near Winston or Salems.
Not even close to American Spirit.
More likely Bull Durham and Drum.

Full flavor sticks hung all through the entire shingle barn,
above my head where I set gas to boil beans and
waited outside underneath the tin shade
resting on poles which were only sideways logs.

A wasp landed near my shoulder
and died.
Maybe it got cured inside the loft.
It was huge, black, hard and shiny, so
large the only dime in my pocket

barely marked its half trunk.

I remember ant lions tossing dust
up over the dead wasp
like a funeral.

And the funeral for the grandma down the road

how she'd spent so much time making this apron
I remember on my lap.
In a time when women don't wear
aprons much anymore.