Poem: Black Berry

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FRANK X WALKER

BLACK BERRY

For Timothy Pigford

If Wendell Berry was black and planting seeds, If Henry County was still in Virginia or Carolina, his Mad Farmer’s Manifesto would have wrapped the good dishes for the move, after he left the farm

Of course, being a real farmer poet he would no more quit the land than the land would quit him, at first

he’d hire himself out, sharecrop somebody else’s dreams, dig up their soil and plant his own ambitions deeper than the cancer of his skin

He’d water it with regret and longing until it petaled and bloomed, yielding a harvest of angry black letters and tears

If Wendell Berry was a mad black farmer his grandson would be standing here right now, telling you how the closest he ever got to farming was the liberation garden we planted on railroad property and the bean that finally broke ground in the chocolate milk carton in the fifth grade.