

my mother into it too, maybe talking
to the asparagus in the kitchen.
anyway, we hung the photograph
in the kitchen, had dinner,
after which we watched
a documentary on coney island.
my older sister called from
north carolina, wishing my father
a happy father's day; my
younger sister had called from
jersey before i had arrived.
my mother had made lasagna.
it was his day,
and it was what
he had wanted.

BLACK WALNUT TREES

my father gave me some black walnut trees,
little things, about two, three inches in height,
to plant around the farmhouse here. every so often
he'll find one growing in or around his garden.
sometime back he was visiting a friend in jersey
and this man gave my father a bunch of black walnuts
from a tree he had growing in his yard.
my father brought them home, but my mother threw
them out on my father's compost pile, in
defeat, not being able to open them up
easily enough. eventually, after the compost
was put to use, these black walnut trees
started shooting up everywhere. today
he pulled one out of the ground to show me.
and the walnut itself was still there,
black and split open, the little tree being
nourished by the meat of the nut.
so, tomorrow i am going to plant these trees,
after talking to the landlord to see
where he might like them put.
when my father was standing there,
in his garden, holding up the little tree,
the walnut dangling from its roots,
i couldn't help noticing how incredibly
thin he has grown. he talked about
his friend, the one who had given him
the black walnuts, saying that he had died
some months ago from a stroke. before
today i had never known such a tree even existed.
i put the trees he had given me
on the floor of the car by the back seat,
each tree potted in its own paper cup.
other plants were there too; i forget
their names. and in a bucket of water

there were some tall wildflowers, a huge
batch of them gladly gotten rid of
by my father. i take all these
unwanted trees and flowers.

i'll stick them in the ground and
if they live they live, and if they
die they die. only thing is, with the
walnut trees: i don't see myself
being around long enough
to witness them ever
maturing into anything
meaningful.

ONLY FOR THE OLD AND THE FRAGILE

i don't know why i want to live to be an old man.
but i find that i do. it seems odd to me, when i
really think about it. there isn't much that
i want to accomplish. no major goals have made
themselves known to me. i can't see my lazy self
solving any of the serious problems facing this race
of humans i've somehow become a part of.
that sounds condescending, and i am sorry.
i want to love another woman, create more of
these poems and like some other poets i know
drink many more glasses of wine.
at the end of it all dying a gracious death
might prove to be a worthwhile act.
and just once i would like to be able to
charm the birds out of the trees.
i've heard it said that certain people can do this,
and these people are spoken of with very
noticeable envy. it'd be nice to convince
a good number of birds to come down
and land on my shoulders. if i were an
old man i would be thin and light
and these birds could pick me up and
carry me away. they would also be kind
enough to pick my wife up also.
we would float comfortably about in
the air like people in a painting
by chagall. this would be something
to live to be an old man for.
i have no desire to accumulate
wealth, and fame is completely out
of the question.
just to be held aloft
by the birds would be plenty.
birds only do this
for the old
and the fragile.

— Ronald Baatz

Mt. Tremper NY