

## The Dusk Which Falls Each Evening in Look Park

"Picture them in the dusk at Look Park  
playing in the fading light . . ."  
(following a gift of tennis rackets  
to Michael, 12, and Peter, 14)  
—for Theodore Deppe

It will not be quite as you said it would be  
(one learns to make allowances for gaps,  
emptiness where the backgrounds waver, blur,  
shadows lapping the edges, imprecision

where the borders converge, distance misjudged,  
obscurities attaching here throughout:  
absences ravaging the heart of portraits  
which, at last, would get the thing right, or deep),

though, I must say, you have gotten precisely  
the look of twilight settling on the court,  
the stillness of the air, the larches, past us,  
stirring not at all as the dark comes down;

the pure astonishment on the boys' faces  
(the sense of we-are-here-but-where-is-here?),  
damp and flushed after two or three hard sets,  
once they have been given to understand

what is to become of them, of us all,  
playing and playing past what light permits,  
evening filtering slowly through the leaves,  
the game becoming us, or we the game,

or neither necessarily the other,  
 as we stand here, stand here, mind you, assenting,  
 letting it come down on us, tidal, crucial,  
 letting the park do with us as it must.

Are we, then, mere positioning, mere view  
 (Indiana?, Florence?, the Caribbean?);  
 is there seeing which, in time, transcends seeing?  
 Shall it be no more than aspects of vision

at stake here?, could the poem have been called  
 The Looking and the Looking in Look Park?  
 (Picture them, picture them; the greater wisdom  
 might well have been to ask: desist, desist.)

How, one asks, is one to live with the view?  
 Shall we turn back, or be turned back, appear  
 oblivious to what most moves us, cry  
 No, at last, when asked would you choose to see?,

choose to suffer what sight, pure sight, exacts?  
 How, in the simplest terms, does one go on  
 (blinded?, speechless?, passionate?, implicated?)  
 after an arm is raised, a wrist is flexed,

after the glimpse, the half-glimpse, of the court  
 (one's gaze level — not clear-eyed — , injudicious,  
 waiting to apprehend the thing it came for,  
 flicker and glow, two figures, what avails)

giving way to the waves of darkness falling,  
 succumbing to such pangs of dislocation  
 as one knows it has not succumbed before  
 (it will not be quite as you said it would be);

after the alterations seize the mind,  
 small encroachments of which one takes no notice  
 until later, after each shall have changed us,  
 the net unraveling, the clay turned dust,

chalk-marks wavering, smudged, the borders crossed,  
 the wind lifting the ball beyond a park  
 nothing so much becomes as disappearance,  
 and the larches, leafing out, once proud, tall,

each now bearing the scar of an impairment  
 ambiguously poised, if poised at all,  
 forever on the brink of a disclosure  
 certain to complicate the picture further;

after the game is tied at thirty-love  
 and the boys, glancing upward, brief distraction  
 before one or the other shudders, serves  
 (an arm raised, a wrist flexed), begin, aloud,

the counting of the stars, that infinite  
 progression into numbers, into dreams,  
 into the very syllables of darkness,  
 begin, light-struck, and struck again, to name them.

In the end it shall have little to do  
 with the completion of the match, the set,  
 even after the chalk-marks, drawn stark white,  
 slip into dissolution, and the foul lines,

splendid, once, at defining, setting borders  
 between what seems still possible, what not,  
 lie wasted, crossed, recrossed, obliterated,  
 shall, in fact, have still less to do with winning.

Nor shall it have to do with canvas shoes,  
 regulation, impeccable, high style,  
 (the shade, the fashion, just the shade, the fashion,  
 to see us through, cause us to seem authentic,

magical, graceful, glittering, superb,  
 cause us, suddenly, to transcend ourselves,  
 cultivate ankles, wrists, break into song,  
 have opulence fall from us, serve by serve,

at last, at last, transform us into winners),  
 half into darkness, more than half to loss,  
 holding to clay with a tenacity  
 unimpeachable, singleminded, rare,

yet with becoming modesty, for all that,  
 as one rushes the net (late surge?, late rally?,  
 a mustering of strengths?, a show of nerve?)  
 in order that we lull them into thinking

the ball falls short, shall fail to clear the court  
 (the racket flowing deftly from the body),  
 the backhand shall be gentle, dream-like, kind  
 (the body, no less deft, flowing from mind).

What is it in the scene persists, yes, haunts?  
 Shall we once more look into their young faces,  
 quite forgetting the set being contested,  
 the rules by which the players shall be bound?

Is it possible, sifting through the hunger,  
 the lust for winning, ravaging their faces,  
 not to know this could as well have been called  
 Triumph Heaped Upon Triumph in Look Park?

What shall there be to win, and who shall win it?  
 What is left of the light to hoist on pennants  
 lashed to posts which anchor the net in clay?  
 Where are the borders drawn, who is to draw them?

What is it in the scene persists, prevails?  
 Did the racket flow truly from the body,  
 the body issue deeply from the mind?  
 And was the backhand dream-like, even kind?

Picture them, picture them: is it yet time  
 to ask how one accommodates the view,  
 how one is to live with accommodation?  
 It need not be quite as you said it would be.

Shall this be the seeing transcending seeing?  
 Is this the best one does, then, one can do,  
 make one's peace with the dark (or with oneself),  
 with the problematic shadows of figures

flushed now, and damp, no more than boys, twelve, fourteen,  
 dreamers not quite what, once, you said they would be,  
 all night rushing the net, dreaming of far courts  
 infinitely resilient, wholly boundless,

opening, ravishingly, into life,  
 limits no longer crudely edged in chalk,  
 as once, of course, they were, were thought to be;  
 figures given to pause, to catch their breath,

embarking on the counting of the stars,  
 coming upon that poetry of names  
 too brief, too fierce, too sumptuous for mouths  
 no more than boys' mouths trembling in the dark,

not readily distinguished from the clay  
 on which two boys trailed luster in the serve,  
 longing for that small strangeness we called winning  
 (Look Park Too Late or Look Park Not At All)?

What is it in the scene insists, impales?  
 Need we cherish the view, live with the hope  
 each perspective from which it grips us makes  
 seeing synonymous with seeing clearly?

Do we shudder, court risk, live reconciled  
 to the fall of the dark, the fabled view,  
 to the first stars, precipitous ascensions,  
 to The Visions and Whispers in Look Park,

only, at last, to have the night dissuade us,  
 yield us another view, scene, panorama  
 (Indiana?, Florence?, the Caribbean?),  
 each as ambiguous as the one after?

Are the children historical, then, quaint?  
Do all panoramas equally blind?  
Must we stand there, stand there, mind you, assenting,  
the stars long counted, the afflictions named?

What shall one come to live by in the evening?  
What shall one have been made, once more, to suffer  
should strangeness, splendor, this late, break upon us?  
Are we our own positioning, our view?

Was hope, in fact, the will to see, to name?  
How shall one have learned what to call each star?  
Are there names enough for the constellations?  
When does the language give out, fervor, loss?

Say what the gaze shall come to, glance, or half-glance.  
Shall we appear enchanted or appalled?  
Whisper, late, what most matters, what coheres now.  
The dark tonight knows little but to fall.

Nothing need be quite as you said it would be.  
Picture them, picture them; given the choice,  
which, this late, would we choose: seeing or living?  
The dark, the dark, the dark assails Look Park.