Edging Dusk, Ars Poetica

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When we meet now, we meet always at dusk to play. The hard sun soothed, easing off, is a mere sky of placid sea, a pale plain of dimming blue and dun.

Even against the forest of walnut, sassafras, and oak hedging our court, I can see his silhouette clearly, as if he were a distinct piece of night broken away, the sureness and potency of night taken shape and set before me. I imagine a greeting.

I serve. He receives. We play. He’s quick, anticipating me, meeting each volley squarely. The thonk of the ball found and sent speeding back and forth is a smooth, fulfilling pleasure in the body, as keen, as sweet as the swallow of warm bread dipped in vinegar oil.

My aim determines his position; his return predestines mine. I like what I become. I adore his reckoning. More than once, I want to jump the net and take him down. Pin his shoulders. Kiss his face. Our game is more than memory and prophecy.

Gradually the screen of trees dissolves, disappears; or else the night expands, absorbing the spaces inside each vein and limb; or else the forest and the night switch names, trade places. I lose sight of him among the cast of stars.
His return comes from farther and farther away, the thrust of the ball sounding more and more of shadow, its journey back to me a longer and longer message. I can still judge his angle, still hear the nuance of his strategies. I know his study.

I dart forward, swing high, send the next ball back with all the might of my several minds, watch, listen, ready in my stance, wait for as long it takes.