

LAWRENCE JAY DESSNER

Tennis Pro

The air is one great dripping cloud.
The dark blue Atlantic rolls and yawns.
It is early; the gulls are up
And strolling scavengers,
Eking out their retirement,
Prod refuse.
Bus boys are slicking down their hair,
Waiters brushing their teeth.

He has had his sprinklers out for an hour.
Like thousands of small tennis balls,
Expensive water pocks the red clay's
Veils of grit.
Fallen, a gnarled palm frond
Spreads toward the base line;
Its yellow-freckled shoulder shines,
Shudders with each stab of the circling fusilade.

Eleven pair of smooth-soled tennis shoes,
Lace ends dappled with rust,
Canvas worn to translucence under raised nap.
Knees bent, back straight as pipe,
He lines them up where the sun,
If it come,
May dry them,
Freshen their musk of powder and lint.

He has three lessons this morning,
Two widows and a shy chiropodist.
At noon an insurance man
Will pay to win a few games,
Today, perhaps, a set.
The Pro will open overpriced cans of tennis balls—
Whoosh, sweetest of all God's breezes;
His shoes will return a usurer's rent.

The racquet feels good—
Good? Wonderful—in his hand.
(He beat Riggs, in '43, with this one.)
He dances back, *glissade*, *relevé*,
Sweeps round to his left,
Racquet head behind his ear,
Muscles stretching, deliciously coiling.
A hesitation, a glance across the parking lot:

The sky, the dark blue pool,
Three Cubans warming themselves around a coffee urn,
Patio tables, waiting.
Then into it,
Through it;
Down the line,
A backhand explodes
Like a cloudburst.

ELIZABETH MacDANIEL STEALEY

One Last Time

As the night approaches
She holds his hand
And whispers with hidden despair,

Hears her name one last time
On his cracked, withered lips.
Now she's alone. Life moves on.