

Charles Hughes

Love Keeps the Evening Sky

Tie game, six-six. Indifferent dusk descending.
The umpire ruled they'd play another inning.
A sweetness from the river censed the air
They played in, and the sun contributed
What light it could through low, dissolving clouds:

Some pink, some purple, others indigo.
One boy, who in his four at-bats so far
Had struck out every time, singled to left
His fifth time up, then scored the winning run
On the next batter's double to the fence.

Time passed. He lived the way most people live.
As an old man, he turned a little silent,
Poking around dead jealousies and angers,
His permanently undone kindnesses.
That single of his, that dive across home plate;

He'd caught from them a certain confidence,
A sudden-onset faith in time itself —
In time's forbearance — which would go with him
To grown-up life, too comfortable to question.
"You fail, you can redeem yourself in time" —

Practical shorthand for this faith he'd lived by,
Not mourning much the moments as they vanished,
Until an evening sky came back to him:
Its darkening cloud-shards treading perfumed air,
The brave blood-redness of the laboring sun.

Charles Hughes

Late Bloomer

Forty-eight hours it took the trees
To go from black to green, the grass
To match, the tulips to amass —
In sunlit, patchwork congeries —

Reds, yellows, lavenders, and whites.
Finally, spring's up! — but slept so late —
Now pressing to accelerate
The pace at which its day ignites.

All of which calls to mind a man
Whose Ph.D. had been delayed
(Why? — I guess I was afraid
To ask) and who at last began

Teaching at fifty, no doubt aware
He might redeem — or he might not —
The time he'd lost for doing what
He once joked was his cross to bear.

His course on Christian thought was work:
Long books to read; two papers; three
Exams (one more than normal). He
Got dubbed the Human Question Mark,

Aptly, his posture signaling stress.
Stooped shoulders, tall (six-three?), rail-thin,
He'd stand sideways and lecture in
His tight-wound way, short on success.

One morning, May had jumped ahead,
From ur-July to faux November:
Cold, whipping rain I still remember.
And I remember how he said —

Just after letting the class know
He'd learned he'd soon be unemployed —
While senseless weather rendered void
Blossoms spring meant at least for show —

“With God, all things are possible.”
No faintest note of irony.
Evenly, unselfconsciously.
More eye contact than usual.