OUR CHILDREN PLAYING CATCH IN THE EVENING OF NO WARNING

A nearness in the twilight, the lovely arc.
Cut grass not yet the scent of elegy.
Then the elegy. Then the years . . .
Now my four year old plying a small ball
across the floor at his nine months sister,
my wife listening behind her book, the dusk
rolling over the houses, the fingers
of my right hand unfurling to catch a ball
my father tosses a year before his death.
That old fact so dim today.

Such a thing to learn . . .
Not deliverance, nor elegy, always the white ball
in its sure circuit, the easy backward draw
of the glovehand. In the sky above my children

I am playing ball, the warm crutches
leaning like a song in the dugout
as I limp for the batter's box.
In the sky above my children, I limp
for the batter's box and watch a soft line drive
float safely above a glove.

And so the forgetting floats on the small charities
of applause, the pinchrunner's comic awe . . .
My daughter, my son elaborate in his coaching . . .

We can't hold all the facts for long
I'm still surprised how we stopped playing that one night
when my father went inside astonished, hurt
—the ball I'd thrown—
the crisp delayed ache when it drilled his forearm,

his whispering how it actually hit him,
that this was not meant-to-be.

There are no signs. That's the problem.
As we stop to listen to the last few seconds of dusk
submerge beneath the evening of no warning,
it may strike us again, the breath
actually stricken from our lungs.

Then the nearness in the twilight.
Then the little ones in their time.