Fast Break

In Memory of Dennis Turner, 1946-1984

Edward Hirsch

A hook shot kisses the rim and
hangs there, helplessly, but doesn’t drop,
and for once our gangly starting center
boxes out his man and times his jump
perfectly, gathering the orange leather
from the air like a cherished possession
and spinning around to throw a strike
to the outlet who is already shoveling
an underhand pass toward the other guard
scissoring past a flat-footed defender
who looks stunned and nailed to the floor
in the wrong direction, trying to catch sight
of a high, gliding dribble and a man
letting the play develop in front of him
in slow motion, almost exactly
like a coach’s drawing on the blackboard,
both forwards racing down the court
the way that forwards should, fanning out
and filling the lanes in tandem, moving
together as brothers passing the ball
between them without a dribble, without
a single bounce hitting the hardwood
until the guard finally lunges out
and commits to the wrong man
while the power-forward explodes past them
in a fury, taking the ball into the air
by himself now and laying it gently
against the glass for a lay-up,
but losing his balance in the process,
inexplicably falling, hitting the floor
with a wild, headlong motion
for the game he loved like a country
and swiveling back to see an orange blur
floating perfectly through the net.

from Wild Gratitude, 1990
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