Fast Break

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*In Memory of Dennis Turner, 1946-1984*

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.

Edward Hirsch, “Fast Break” from *Wild Gratitude.* Copyright © 1985 by Edward Hirsch. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

Source: *Wild Gratitude* (1985)

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/179072>