

Good “D” · *James McKean*

—after *Edward Hirsh*

Their center blocks out and the ball
falls into his lap like the coach’s book

says it will. Pivot, two-handed chest pass
to the outlet man, his flip

to a guard sprinting up the middle and the crowd
senses a break rolling at half court

and rises now for the finish, the jam
over a nondescript visitor

in knee wraps, invited to play in this gym
well lit on a Friday night in a state

that welcomes him and would send him packing
and bruised except he’s hustled back

and turns in their key to wait—all taped fingers
and high tops—before the whole floor,

the forwards in their lanes pumping toward him
fast, two points on the stat sheets

written all over their faces, the guard dribbling
too high, head down as if he

needs a script, the guard who loves his right hand,
who pulls up late, who looks where he

passes, drunk on the home court’s
din of expectation, everyone on their feet

for a goal good as given
over the nobody in his dull uniform

who stutter rushes the guard left, left
hand up, right down,

and releases the moment the pass is flung in panic,
the forward rising toward the basket

empty-handed because good defense reads well,
lives in the passing lane and lifts

the ball from beneath. Now, the forward,
who can't come down fast enough,

and the guard, suddenly tired, find far
up the floor the score turned,

the time gone and the crowd at a loss, fumbling
to sit back down, to say anything

for what's been stolen.