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Elegy for Richard Coones

Lance Larsen

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Elegy for Richard Coones

by Lance Larsen

He'd prefer a preacher
 with a gap-toothed smile
 and enough moves to dribble
 his way through Purgatory.
 I sit in the last row,
 wishing coaches were canonized.
 I'm talking about the real coaches,
 who feel it in their thighs
 when a shot goes up.
 Richard Coones did.
 Basketball was his blood.
 He invoked the gods
 in the name of trajectory
 and sent us to Hell
 for a missed pick.
 That was junior high.

We pulled supporters
 over thin thighs
 and wore T-shirts
 like numbered skins.
 I think of the old gym,
 how the light would fall
 from smoky windows
 on the lady running the timer,
 and I see how this service
 ought to be—altar boys in jocks
 and cassocks running lay-ins,
 the choir singing rockabilly,
 and Richard in a sweatshirt
 yelling from his box.
 Afterwards, they could pry up
 the boards, drop him at the baseline,
 and ask Cousy and Havlicek
 to pray him into Heaven.

If it can't be this way,
 I'll pay my respects later.
 High tops laced firm,
 wristband in place,
 I'll head for the park.
 I'll eye the chain-link net
 and start from mid-court—
 seven steps, three dribbles,
 a lift of my knee, and I'll rise,
 a slow smoke.