Old Men Playing Basketball

By B. H. Fairchild

The heavy bodies lunge, the broken language of fake and drive, glamorous jump shot slowed to a stutter. Their gestures, in love again with the pure geometry of curves,

rise toward the ball, falter, and fall away. On the boards their hands and fingertips tremble in tense little prayers of reach and balance. Then, the grind of bone

and socket, the caught breath, the sigh, the grunt of the body laboring to give birth to itself. In their toiling and grand sweeps, I wonder, do they still make love

to their wives, kissing the undersides of their wrists, dancing the old soft-shoe of desire? And on the long walk home from the VFW, do they still sing

to the drunken moon? Stands full, clock moving, the one in army fatigues and houseshoes says to himself, *pick and roll*, and the phrase sounds musical as ever,

radio crooning songs of love after the game, the girl leaning back in the Chevy’s front seat as her raven hair flames in the shuddering light of the outdoor movie, and now he drives,

gliding toward the net. A glass wand of autumn light breaks over the backboard. Boys rise up in old men, wings begin to sprout at their backs. The ball turns in the darkening air.
