

THE NEW TROPIC



Messi's Miami debut and Jimmy B-inspired poetry

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Poetry from The Writer's Room

"What I believe most fervently about poetry is that every poem carries both a moment and a lifetime" says Caridad Moro-Gronlier, curator of our monthly feature of work by poet alumni of The Betsy Writer's Room. "I believe a poem is a time capsule, an artifact, an instant made eternal in the telling."

This month's poet, [Reginald Dwayne Betts](#), captures this sentiment beautifully and offers us two poems by way of definition—both about basketball, his sons, and the commemoration of the moments one wants to remember forever, no matter how fleeting."

"Two poems. One about my youngest son, dribbling down the court with wild abandon; the other about Jimmy Butler, shooting jumpers at night after a loss," explains Betts. "Poetry is how those two moments on a court are connected, and why one night Miles stood courtside in DC, hoping for Jimmy's autograph, even though they'd lost by 20 that night."

Jimmy Butler After Game Six

& beneath the moon:
right hand high, windblown strings.

AND

Memorial Hoops

The day broke a record for cold, for us wanting
To be anywhere but outside, & it was late
May, the weekend we called Memorial. My mother

Is a veteran, but that is a story for another time,
& we were driving into the mother of rivers state,
My youngest son, named after two men, one who
Turned a trumpet into a prayer, the other who
Before a piano became whatever those who know say
G-d sounds like, me, & friends, who like me, imagined
Watching their sons trade baskets with strangers
Was some kind of holy. Around us was more granite
Than Black folks & I carried Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*
In my knapsack, hesitant to return to all the astonishing
Ways we make each other suffer &, still, somehow,
Survive, & astonished most by how we remember. I've
Forgotten my fair share of things that matter. But
Who am I kidding? The weekend was about
Basketball. We'd driven three hours to this colder
Weather. My youngest boy hoped he'd heat up once
A ball touched his hands. Did I say we named the child
After the idiosyncrasies of Jazz, all because as children
I don't think my wife & I knew enough ambition
To save us from what we'd encounter. These were the days

When he and the nine he suited up with desired
Little more than to hear the rasp of a ball against whatever
Passed for wood in a gym with a hoop. There is something
To be said about how basketball makes men of boys and boys
Of men. The ref who chattered with us parents wondered
Why a cousin the age of the ballers ate chips for breakfast.
The other team had a player who made me think, though
She be but little she is fierce, as she, the only girl on
The court slipped a jewel into that hovering crown
We cheered, even those of us whose boys sought to dribble
& jump shot their way to the glory of a win. & when Miles
Came down as if he knew what would happen. I didn't hold
My breath. A crossover, the ball then swung around his back,
The kid before him lost on some raft in a wild river. Maybe
He knew the ball would fall true because he turned around
To watch us as much as to get back on defense. We laughed
& laughed & watched as kids barely large enough to launch
all of that need at a target did so, again & again.

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