

Classic Poetry Series

Evie Shockley

- poems -

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Ballplayer

i cop a squat on a squared-off log,
to watch you ball on the community center court.
butt numb, i shift my weight

and shake mosquitos from my ankles,
but never take my eyes off the game.
yours follow the orange orb, your pupils
twin, brown moons reflecting its light.

your play is wild efficiency,
you are a four-pronged magic wand,
waving, as if agentless, in all directions at once.
an opponent dribbles the ball - now he sees it,

now he don't, it's gone, flown,
and you've given it its wings.
you are one-eighth of the shrieking rubber,

one-eighth of the growls and calls. you are
the delicious assist, the unerring pass.
you spread your skills out before me, a peacock
among pigeons, as if to say "all eyes on me,"

and make it worth my while.
a chill trails the sun west like a long, clammy train,
crawls over me and my makeshift bench,
over the emptying playground,

but stops at the edge of the concrete,
where eight men burning keep it at bay,
the way torches smoking around a patio

ward off insects. twilight rises like dark steam
from the dewy grass, but you don't see it.
the ball still lights the court
until the winning jumper sinks and puts it out.

then earth returns to view, and you jog over
to slap my palm and beam,
and receive the grin i give you like a trophy.

Evie Shockley

Where is it Clean

when your mother can rise from her place
on the pew during the early service,
early enough that the sun barely fills the sky
with its weak straw, but row after row
in the auditorium is flush with folks who want
to be home before the football game gets underway
or hate the slower pace the later service takes
but still got to get their god on
before starting a new week: when she can rise
and tip down the aisle, three-inch heels
pointing a warning at hell through the plush
mauve carpet, smile and nod at preacher,
who is sitting on the pulpit's little throne
with his bible beneath his palm, a man thick-chested
and stout-bellied with moral authority, whose face
gleams with crushing benevolent power:
when she can give him a pleasant nod,
and circle around behind the microphone standing
like a thin silver trophy between the heavenly
floral arrangements, give a firm tug
to the hem of her suit jacket, and lean over
the dimpled nob, the ribbons encircling the crown
of her broad-brimmed hat quivering with each
breath, the crisp white paper in her hands
held out at arm's length from her customary squint,
her eyes scooting back and forth,
between this document and the village of worshipers
fanning themselves and waiting on her voice:
when she can stand there and coo, good morning,
praise the lord and introduce her reading
as a poem by my daughter, a quick look
at your beaming father, then take your words
between her lightly pinked lips and raise each one
to the light, before god and these witnesses,
enunciating like she learned to recite from the fourth-

grade primer in her schoolhouse's single room,
sending sound through the vowels
like a bell: when she can do this, can rise and walk,
and smile and read and have the church say amen -
then you can safely declare: it is clean.

Evie Shockley