

A P O E M F O R " M A G I C " ;  
for Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Donnell Reid and Richard Franklin

take it to the hoop, "magic" johnson,  
take the ball dazzling down the open lane  
herk & jerk & raise your six foot nine inch  
frame into air sweating screams of your neon name  
"magic" johnson, nicknamed "windex" way back in high school  
'cause you wiped glass backboards so clean  
wherc you first juked & shook  
& wiled your way to glory  
a new styled fusion of shake & bake energy  
using everything possible you created your own space  
to fly through—any moment now we expect your wings  
to spread feathers for that spooky take-off of yours  
then shake & glide till you hammer home  
a clothesline deuce off glass  
now, come back down with a reverse hoodoo gem  
off the spin, & stick it in sweet popping nets  
clean from twenty feet right side

put the ball on the floor, "magic"  
slide the dribble behind your back, ease it deftly  
between your bony stork legs, head bobbing everwhichaway  
up & down, you see everything on the court, off the high  
yoyo patter, stop & go dribble, you shoot  
a threading needle rope pass sweet home to kareem  
cutting through the lane, his skyhook pops the cords  
now lead the fastbreak, hit jamaal on the fly  
now blindsided behind the back pinpointpass for two more  
off the fake, looking the other way  
you raise off balance into tense space  
sweating chants of your name, turn 360 degrees  
on the move your legs scissoring space like a swimmer's  
yo-yoing motion in deep water, stretching out now  
towards free flight, you double pump through human trees

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hang in place, slip the ball into your left hand  
then deal it like a las vegas card dealer off squared glass  
into nets living up to your singular nickname, so "bad"  
you cartwheel the crowd towards frenzy  
wearing now your electric smile, neon as your name

in victory we suddenly sense your glorious uplift  
your urgent need to be champion  
& so we cheer, rejoicing with you for this quicksilver, quicksilver, quicksilver  
moment of fame, so put the ball on the floor again, "magic"  
juke & dazzle, shaking & baking down the lane  
take the sucker to the hoop, "magic" johnson  
recreate reverse hoodoo gems off the spin  
deal alley-oop-dunk-a-thon-magician passes, now  
double-pump, scissor, vamp through space, hang in place  
& put it all in the sucker's face, "magic" johnson  
& deal the roundball like the juju man that you am  
like the sho-nuff shaman man that you am  
"magic," like the sho-nuff spaceman you am

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## A POEM FOR "MAGIC"

for Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Donnell Reid & Richard Franklin



take it to the hoop, "magic" johnson,  
take the ball dazzling down the open lane  
herk & jerk & raise your six-foot, nine-inch frame  
into air sweating screams of your neon name  
"magic" johnson, nicknamed "windex" way back  
in high school  
    cause you wiped glass backboards  
so clean, where you first juked & shook  
wiled your way to glory  
    a new-style fusion of shake-&-bake  
energy, using everything possible, you created your own  
space to fly through—any moment now  
we expect your wings to spread feathers for that spooky takeoff  
of yours—then, shake & glide & ride up in space  
till you hammer home a clothes-lining duece off glass  
now, come back down with a reverse hoodoo gem  
off the spin & stick in sweet, popping nets clean  
from twenty feet, right side  
put the ball on the floor again, "magic"

slide the dribble behind your back, ease it deftly  
between your bony stork legs, head bobbing everwhichaway  
up & down, you see everything on the court  
off the high yoyo patter

    stop & go dribble

you thread a needle-rope pass sweet home  
to kareem cutting through the lane

    his skyhook pops the cords  
now, lead the fastbreak, hit worthy on the fly  
now, blindside a pinpoint behind-the-back pass for two more  
off the fake, looking the other way, you raise off-balance  
into electric space

sweating chants of your name

turn, 180 degrees off the move, your legs scissoring space  
like a swimmer's voyaging motion in deep water  
stretching out now toward free flight  
you double-pump through human trees

    hang in place

slip the ball into your left hand  
then deal it like a las vegas card dealer off squared glass  
into nets, living up to your singular nickname  
so "bad" you cartwheel the crowd toward frenzy  
wearing now your electric smile, neon as your name

in victory, we suddenly sense your glorious uplift  
your urgent need to be champion

& so we cheer with you, rejoice with you

    for this quicksilver, quicksilver,

quicksilver moment of fame

so put the ball on the floor again, "magic"

juke & dazzle, shake & bake down the lane

take the sucker to the hoop, "magic" johnson,

recreate reverse hoodoo gems off the spin

deal alley-oop dunkathon magician passes

now, double-pump, scissor, vamp through space

hang in place

& put it all up in the sucker's face, "magic" johnson,  
& deal the roundball like the juju man that you am  
like the sho-nuff shaman that you am, "magic,"  
like the sho-nuff spaceman you am

## & SYLLABLES GROW WINGS THERE

a blackboard in my mind holds words eye dream—  
& blessed are the words that fly like birds into poetry—  
& syllables attach wings to breath & fly away there  
through music, my language springing round from where  
a bright polished sound, burnished as a new copper penny  
shines in the air like the quick, jabbing glint of a trumpet  
lick flicking images through voices there pulsating like strobe lights  
the partying dark understands, as heartbeats pumping rhythms hip-  
hopping through footsteps, tick-tocking like clocks with stopgap  
measures of caesuras breaking breath, like california earth-  
quakes trying to shake enjambed fault lines of minimalls  
freeways & houses off their backs, rocks being pushed up there  
by edges of colliding plates, rivers sliding down through yawning  
cracks, pooling underneath speech, where worlds collide & sound cuts  
deep fissures into language underneath the earth, the mystery of it all  
seeded within the voodoo magic of that secret place, at the center  
of boiling sound & is where poetry springs from now  
with its heat of eruption, carrying volcanic lava flows of word  
sound cadences, a sluiced-up voice flowing into the poem's  
mysterious tongue, like magic, or fingers of fire dancing,  
gaseous stick figures curling off the sun's back  
& is where music comes up from, too, to improvise  
like choirs of birds in springtime, when the wind's breath  
turns warm & their voices riff off sweet songs, a cappella