

3-1-1998

Pomona Against Redlands, February 9, 1965

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Recommended Citation

Fisher, Jessica (1998) "Pomona Against Redlands, February 9, 1965," *Yalobusha Review*: Vol. 4 , Article 31.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol4/iss1/31>

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Jessica Fisher

Pomona against Redlands, February 9, 1965

for my father and his father

I.

Even now my father whistles when he breathes through his nose.
Before three-pointers and strict time limits on holding

he was a great guard, would run the court with his mouth
wagging open. She and her man loved to go to the games

but their boy was an embarrassment to her, sweating and
gaping even when he was standing still, even when

the cameras turned to him. She'd wave till he looked her way,
then open and close her mouth like a fish. For a few

minutes he'd remember, would clench his jaw shut
though he didn't give a damn how he looked out there.

II.

They figured their father didn't give a damn about them, so why
should they bother going to bury him? One of the seven

let go of it enough to make the drive, took a handful
of dirt and let it drop. I don't know if that changed it

for him or if it was just the right thing to do. But I think
the old man cared: the last time I saw him he showed me

a photograph of his boys at that game, Dick shooting,
John pulling down Dick's shorts. Or maybe it was the other

way around. Whoever captured that was brilliant, that
must have been the way they always were, one having

his moment, the other mocking him. The old man kept that photo though he gave the rest of it away, the love seat

and crystal, the white scalloped dishes and all the food left in the cupboards and fridge after she died, the hundreds

of matchbooks. He wanted none of it, wanted to drink in a room of his own, wanted not to have to say

he was going out for a long walk, didn't care for supper. But he wanted the photograph; that ought to count for something.

That ought to mean more than the years of bullshit he gave them, more than drinking away the inheritance, fucking up so bad

their names fell out of the Hollywood blue book and got lost in the white pages, back to back with everyone else in the Valley

who was no one. That photo made the old man laugh, he remembered the night when the Fisher boys went up against

one another at Redlands and nobody could stop the younger, nobody could stop John-fourteen points to the lousiest shooter,

hatchet man wearing his brother out, watching him to see if he'd rebound to the right or to the left of the basket, getting there

in front of him, squaring off, putting him at his back and holding him there. Making the ball bounce.