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From THE OCHRE WORLD

#22

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From *THE OCHRE WORLD*

Note: *The Ochre World* is a 45 page poem, formed at the junction of a dream, a news event, and some photographs of the Lascaux cave paintings. Some of the poem's sections can stand alone, others cannot, but all are enriched by a scheme of recurring imagery and an evolving "argument." Although unnumbered in the full manuscript, I have given these sections—which occur late in the poem—numbers, so the reader can feel the *duration*, at least, of the absent sections.

J.D.

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In Los Angeles, in 1992, the year the ghost of Columbus stalked the Pueblos, the year Americans chose sides, the last year of stupidity and greed, four policemen were acquitted of pummeling a black man. The video showed it clearly, but the video was a video. You could rent them for 49 cents. You could sit back and watch the brutal, simplified world. The evil. The good. This was a service we were provided. Occasionally, a man or woman would stand up from the pages of a novel so mixed, so torn by events, so noble and so battered by conscience that we couldn't recognize him as human except in small groups of the studious. Because a white man once called him a goddamn injun, the young poet denied himself all hope. Because the grocer was Asian, because he was inclined to capitalism and hard work, the neighbors tormented him. The black man who, even at forty-five years old, was beautiful when he drove the baseline, spinning—*his shoes squeaking, the basketball thumping hard into the waxed hardwood floor*—and stuffing the ball behind his head, had no sense of his beauty off the court. Failure soaked into his body as he sat on the locker room bench. The gray walls of failure, the rusted and battered lockers of failure, the waters of failure, hot then cold. In the streets of failure, he walked in his failed clothing. *Spinning, then, his shoes squeaking the basketball thumping. Spinning, and the signature his body left on the air.*