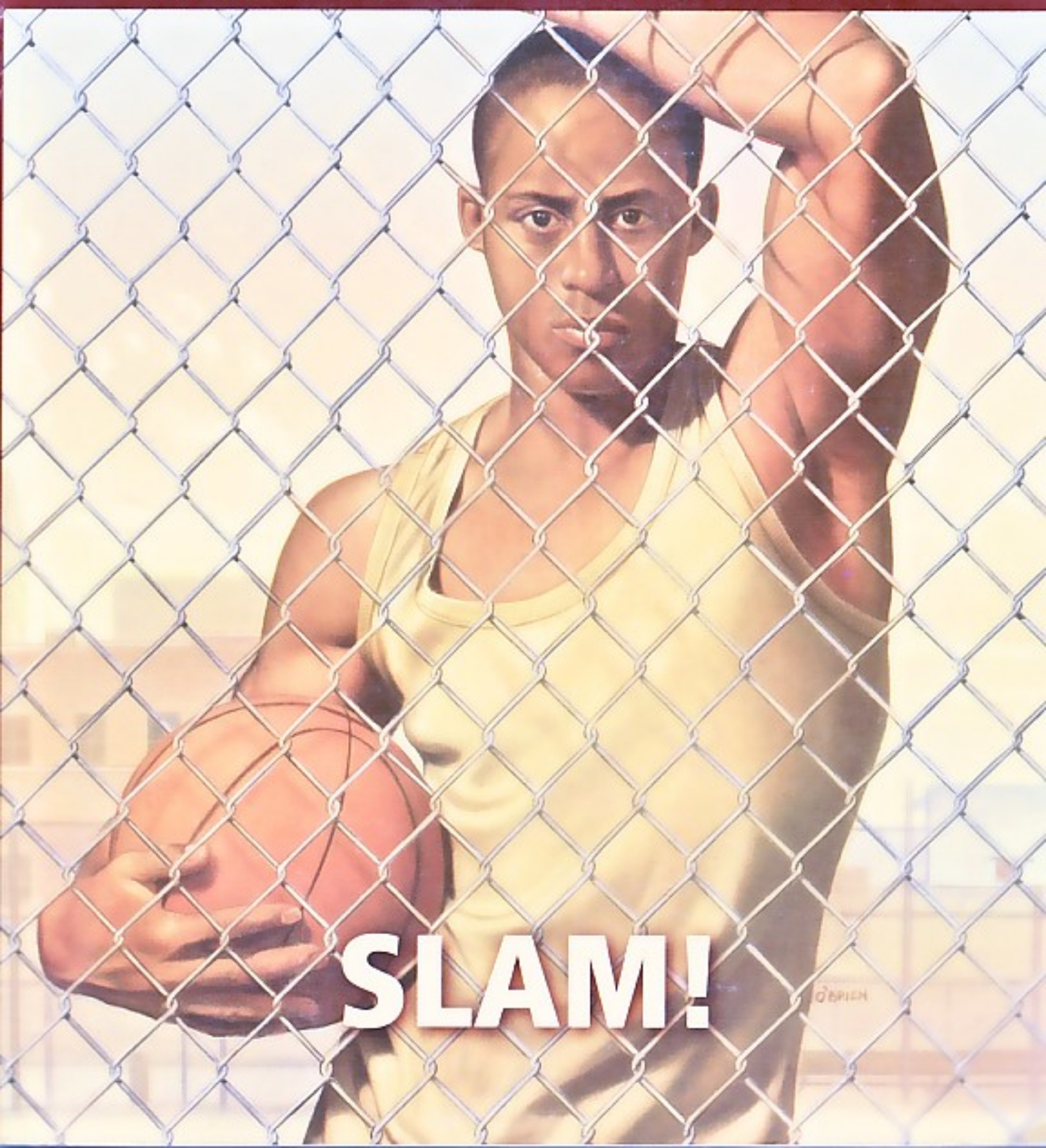


# WALTER DEAN MYERS

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *FALLEN ANGELS* AND *MONSTER*



# SLAM!

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## CHAPTER ONE

**B**asketball is my thing. I can hoop. Case closed. I'm six four and I got the moves, the eye, and the heart. You can take my game to the bank and wait around for the interest. With me it's not like playing a game, it's like the only time I'm being for real. Bringing the ball down the court makes me feel like a bird that just learned to fly. I see my guys moving down in front of me and everything feels and looks right. Patterns come up and a small buzz comes into my head that starts to build up and I know it won't end until the ball swishes through the net. If somebody starts messing with my game it's like they're getting into my head. But if I've got the ball it's okay, because I can take care of the situation. That's the word and I know it the same way I know my tag, Slam. Yeah, that's it. Slam. But without the ball, without the floorboards un-

der my feet, without the mid-court line that takes me halfway home, you can get to me.

So when Mr. Tate, the principal at my new school, started talking about me laying low for the season until I got my grades together I was like seriously turned out. The night after he talked to my moms I couldn't sleep. It wasn't the hissing of the radiator or my little brother talking in his sleep in the other bed, it was the idea of not playing ball that was bouncing crazylike through my head.

Sometimes I don't mind not sleeping. I like to lay in the dark and listen to the sounds coming up from the street. I can lay in bed and tell just what time it is by how much traffic go by in the street below. When it's late night you hear the sound of car doors and people talking and boom boxes spilling out the latest tunes. When it rains the tires hiss on the street and when there's a real rain with the wind blowing sometimes you can hear it against the tin sign over Billy's bicycle shop. If there's a fight you hear the voices rising and catching each other up. The sound of broken glass can cut through other noises, even if it's just a bottle of wine somebody dropped. And behind all the other sounds there's always the sirens, bringing their bad news from far off and making you hold your breath until they pass so you know it ain't any of your

people who's getting arrested or being taken to the hospital. In the early morning you hear the clang of the garbage trucks, then the low growl of the buses and you know the people who got work are starting off downtown to their jobs.

In the morning you don't hear any police sirens or ambulances. It's like all the shooting and chasing is over for the night and the neighborhood is getting ready for a new day. You hear the news on the radios of people who got a reason to get up early and you hear mamas yelling for their kids who go to school to wake up. Soon as the first radio goes on in the morning, Salty, the pit bull Akbar keeps in his shop, wakes up and starts howling. Salty is a trip. He can do his regular howl, which ain't much, or he can howl like a police siren or an ambulance. Whatever way he howls you know what's coming down the street long before you get to see it.

When something bothers me a lot I keep thinking about it, like I'm replaying a tape over and over. No matter what I do it stays in my head.

I must of dozed off and woke up still thinking about my moms coming to school the day before. She's cool. She come to Mr. Tate's office and listened to him talk about how he was so disappointed in me. He was saying it like he knew me,

## It doesn't matter if you win or lose— it's how you play the game.

Greg “Slam” Harris can do it all on the basketball court. He knows he could be one of the lucky ones, making it all the way to the top.

But what if his luck runs out? His grades aren't so hot. His teachers are starting to catch on. And his temper—well, his temper is always on the verge of exploding.

Slam's going one-on-one with his future . . . and it's a showdown he can't afford to lose.

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“Heart-thumping hoop action in a novel that, like most good sports stories, is about more than just sports.” —*Publishers Weekly*

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