

Poetry

baseball.

i never made it to the big leagues

but stretched for that ball at first base
as their clean-up hitter
thunders down upon me that doesn't matter.

strain, leather slapping leather,
ball tucked between webbing,
foot meeting bag.

"Out!" "Safe!" "He's out!" "Okay."

"Out." Ten years ago
my Babe Ruth coach would have argued
ten minutes before returning to the bench,
tonight we debate who should
replace my beer, spilled behind the bag.

Oh Willie Mays,
your image that catches everything
ever hit to it—your greatness
is our silent dream.
but Willie, there's still a lot to be said
for two old Louisville sluggers
by the curb, wooden bases
and a spilled beer bottle
lying in the weeds behind first base.

—Robert J. Rankin