

Playing the Prison Team at Menard

Tex was back for his twenty-first season,
twenty consecutive, then one off,
back after being farmed out to Springfield
and jumping parole. With nothing to do,
one afternoon he backed a truck up
to his mother's house while she was gone
(she was eighty) and sold off her furniture
for a hundred dollars and a cheap case of booze.
So he was recalled. He still had a good
fastball, at thirty-nine, since it's all about
numbers, a decent slider, and was wiser now,
after all the years. Then, too, he had nearly
perfect control. Always around the plate,
picking away at the black, changing speeds.
He could take the buttons off your shirt,
in and out, waiting, waiting for an opening.
Of course there was the element of surprise.
You never knew what he was going to throw
When you least expected it, he'd spin something
unusual in, a forkball, maybe a backdoor slider,
or a drifter with zip on it, that fluttered,
then sailed or rolled off the table, something
that didn't look quite right,
so you suspected he had loaded one up
and wondered what he was chewing,
what he had in his hat or under his fingernails.
After all this was the big house, the big leagues,
he'd been here for twenty-one years,
and there was a certain wisdom and respect in that.
With his record and habits, so what if he got caught?
Where could they send him this time,
and who would bother?
His mother didn't want him back.