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Tee Ball

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Tee Ball

Howard Schaap

We're here to learn the ceremony of first-second-third,
shepherded to this grassy glade by mommies and daddies
bleating repeatedly our anxious names.

The diamond isn't forever, just mowed paths
in the bluegrass and clover that fade week by week.
Each space is a name. You must cover your bag first
and then later, since someone's always trying to steal a purse,
but a second or a short stop is
the time when you're in between bases.
You must play in your space alone together with me
and not cross into my yard that begins and ends
nowhere between us.

The baton of great cultural meaning
is to be swung violently but only in certain circles,
then dropped quickly to become like a snake in the grass,
not passed on and never sent missile-like into the lawn chairs
which leads to whispers, bowed heads,
and exile from the garden.

Pitch is the tone of the ball, high or low.
A ball isn't just a ball but when the ball is off key—
four of them and you must walk a straight line
toward a pillow to rest your feet.

Bases neutralize acids and acerbic prodigies
stirred together by dads in backyard labs
who will push you with scalded cowhide pastry
wrapped and folded around their hard cheese
if they catch you off your pillow.

If we don't talk to strangers, base men
standing around or doing pirouettes in parks,
we'll be safe, especially if we run home,
hurriedly, a race we run alone, without passing
the person in front of us or joining them
for a leisurely stroll.

"Always come home," the parents clap, and if we do,
we get to sit with our friends on the bench
and kick our legs, waiting to go far afield.