

## **The Secret Lives of Baseballs**

by Kristen Baum DeBeasi

I can tell you, we all start out stitched up pretty. All full of the same stuff.  
Pure potential.

No one knows which of us will run foul, who will sail into the stands  
in one glorious arc to the shouts and cheers of everyone. No one knows  
who will be tattooed with the ink of famous men. Coveted. Fought over.  
But we know the stories, told in hushed tones: the legends.  
Everyone loves a winner.

Us? Our first love grew by proximity. We were jammed together,  
hip to hip, and didn't that feel nice? We spent half the season  
in the dark, hands all over each other's smooth skin. We took care  
not to leave a mark. Not to give them a reason to toss us.

We kept moving farther back into the shadows where we could  
steal kisses, share private moments. We tried to stay together,  
but we were ripped apart on the way to the mound. No one heard our cries.

We didn't know what to expect, really. No one truly wonders  
what it's like to get hit. No one thinks of that part, of what's coming.

I can tell you we all have a rude awakening at some point. We find out  
too late, when we're in too deep, sporting black eyes, bruises, nicks;  
when we've already eaten dirt or landed so hard grass stains our knees.

They fondled us. Spit on us. Touched us hard all over. Roughed our stitches.

I can tell you, without us, there is no game. No mob hollering  
for the same thing. Winner takes all.

I know she's out there somewhere, in someone's house. Heard rumors  
she got inked, got sold. But before she was on somebody's mantle  
encased in glass, she was *my* girl.

I don't have a magic mirror to tell me where she's gone to.  
But I'll tell you, as long as I've got my guts, I'll keep looking.