

For Glove of the Game

by Nate Jacob

We would wait the long, dark winters out
under mattresses in the unfinished basement,
rarely dug out into the light except to tend goal
when beds moved aside for roller hockey nights.

Then, once pitchers and catchers reported
and the backyard thawed from the center, out,
we had our own opening days as the old man
warmed us on his calloused hands, massaged life

back into us with mink or sweet baby oil, retied laces,
wrapped us hard with cracking rubber bands
around mud-rubbed balls inside oily garage rags,
until the first dry weekend warmed our hides

and smaller hands held us too high and too loose
and the old man tried until he cussed out loud
to land underhanded lob after underhanded lob
in the deep-worn wells he'd worked into us,

while the young feigned ten minutes' interest
under mother's threat, catching and tossing-almost-
while talking of lucky friends in better places.
Then summer days lengthened, and the old man

shortened his patience for "these rookies," until
we found ourselves sunning, drying, and bleaching
out in the middle of the backyard ball diamond,
the distance between home and first base

longer each spring, grown over by summer,
blanketed by leaves each fall until raked
at last onto the deck, then the basement again.
Baseball is life, but it's an old man's game here.