

Paul O'Neill in the Final Inning

O'Neill Plays On Hours After Father Dies

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by Ann Cefola

O'Neill kicks dust at home plate.
Blood in his throat ticks like the scoreboard,
registering hits, runs, hits. *Focus*, he says.

When did the diamond's soft chalk lines turn hard edge,
the pitcher's throw too fast to navigate?
You never know which way

the ball's going to cut, Torre says. *When it cuts, it cracks.*
Black wood rips open white
and soaring, slow-motion, three times, Rivera the reaper.

Bottom of the ninth, a collective inhale on that final catch.
Microphones wave like spears, all he hears is *one*,
not the way the cameras slice.

In center field, familiar uniforms leap and weave.
Walking into pinstripes, he takes his 6'5" frame and at last leans in
like a sequoia that can no longer face the wind.