

## **Becoming a Baseball Pitcher**

by Steven Pelcman

The stiff grip on the stitching  
of the ball he held in his palm  
reminded him of the scraggly  
rawness of his father's beard

rubbing against his face  
that hot summer he first picked up  
a baseball and threw it into  
an old forgotten mitt,

leaving a dark sound  
against leather that filled him  
and made his blood hot  
and his body rigid.

He had spun the ball  
behind his back  
the way he had first held  
his father's fingers

playing and teasing,  
counting and challenging  
a father's strength  
and the order of things.

The old man pounded the glove  
and pumped his fist giving a sign  
and the boy leaned into  
the exaggerated shadow

stretching across the dirt  
with the hungry look  
of an animal targeting prey  
in the distance.

The faster he threw,  
the smaller the world  
would become until his father  
became, the old man

with the grey beard  
in the stands behind home plate  
as his son stood poised  
on the mound,

his heartbeat slowly increasing  
to the speed of the ball  
he would throw  
and the sound it would make.

He would never be closer  
to his father than that day  
when strike three unleashed  
the roar of the crowd

as the beads of sweat kept falling  
to the ground and the gentle wind  
blustered through the jersey  
his father had once worn.