

Respect Your Elders

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“Ready for a fastball,” the grizzled grampa
leather-lungs. “Alls he’s got’s a fastball.
You can hit a fastball,” he assures

the child of (he’s pretty sure) his own
son’s loins. “Here comes a fastball. Sit
on the fastball. Fastball’s alls he’s got.”

He’s waited 67 years for this: the universe
that has bashed and baffled him—
kept him in shit jobs, a shit marriage,

fishless fishing trips, deerless deer hunts,
Vegas jaunts with “seniors” groups
where he would have won a bundle

but for all those card-shark racketeers—
the universe, so roiled and murky, suddenly
made clear. “Here comes a fastball!

Fastball’s alls he’s got.” And so, for two
strikes and three balls: “Fastball’s
comin’. Has to. Fastball’s alls he’s got.”

Full of faith, the batter wags his stick,
coiled, adder-like to strike the darting rat
of a fastball. The pitcher winds. The pitch

swerves in: a freeze-you-in-your-tracks,
shoot-for-your-head-then drop-and-slice-
the-middle-of-the-plate curveball

that sends the boy back to the bench
scratching his pate, and cursing his idiot
Grampa.