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Stan Musial, in His Next Life

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Stan Musial, in His Next Life

His body uncoiled and snake-whipped
to make his bat soar the ball into the stands;
for his career, his batting average an astounding
.331, especially impressive these days,
when both leagues eke out maybe ten players
apiece who can scratch out averages over .300.

He entertained teammates on the bus,
on plane rides with his harmonica playing,
guys snapping fingers to the happy tunes
Stan flicked off, nothing mournful like the freights
hobos had to jump in the hard Thirties,
with always the threat of bat-wielding railyard bulls.

In his next life, he played that mouth harp
in combos, or solo when his disposition—
sunny as an August doubleheader afternoon—
let him caress wailful tunes of guys sleeping out
under bridges or by trash-flowing rivers.

It was a life of four, five sets a night: falling
into bed at dawn, long rides to gigs in a jalopy
finicky as a mule that might refuse to pull the plow.
But his lips made love to the harp, people cheering
in the booked bars, nightclubs, or auditoriums,

the first notes squealing with joy or sorrow
into the hearts of anyone within whistling distance.