

1992

Etheridge

Don Colburn

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how you scored from second in the fifth game
on Dewey's hit and made it look incredibly
difficult—windmilling around third,
bowlegged and flatfooted, shimmying
till you flopped and skidded home.
NBC loved it and so did we each time
the replay took forever. But that was before
the ground ball and the blank ending,
early winter and its unredeeming spring, and now—
getting cut midseason, a thing they call release.

ETHERIDGE

July. Port Townsend. Early afternoon
and already you were pathetic, fingers
around the neck of a brown sack
under the trees, words botched and rambling.
And that evening, after we'd waited so long
in the dark of the theater
for the only black man in town,
when you came on stage,
brushed aside the mike and opened your throat
to *Willow, Weep for Me*, slow and deep, wavering—
I cringed. But then you turned to poems—
belly songs made up in the joint, about Slick
and Hard Rock and Malcolm and Mr. K
the Love of My Life, and said them by heart
in perfect pitch, never missing a syllable.
Next morning, catching you
weaving across the grass, as barn swallows
flew sheer in the sun, I thought perhaps
you'd climb into the light again to sing.