Bad Beat

MK Punky

Friends say don't take it personally
since the head football coach of a Sunbelt Conference team
couldn't possibly know me
or thousands — millions? — of other observant bettors
who realized his team was unlikely to score their usual tally
when the star running back
a bludgeoning Earl Campbell with Saquon Barkley moves
was nursing a knee injury
exercising "load management" to obviate risk
protecting his soon-to-be highly compensated joint
to earn rewards befitting a First Round draft pick

But I know now
and so does everyone else who watched the post-game highlights
underneath the headset and logo visor and icy stare
lurks a mind dripping with malice
a mean-spirited cuss whose capacity for compassion
does not extend to guys like me
trying valiantly to pay the mortgage and set aside a little something
for his infant daughter's college education
someone who would have done the gentlemanly thing:
take a knee as the clock expires
win by six and go home with another W

Alas alas alas
some wealthy alum must have gotten in the coach's ear
at dinner the night before
must have clinked wine glasses and toasted to a double-digit victory
must be laughing and sneering and gleaning great amusement
at the utterly unnecessary fade route to the corner of the endzone
his boy chose to call on second down from the eight-yard-line
with nineteen seconds left in the game
perfectly aware that a score
would push the Under to Over
ruining wrecking destroying *hurting*
those of us who deserved to win

MK Punky is the poetry handle of Michael Konik, author of 14 books of fiction, journalism, and memoir, including the sports gambling classic *The Smart Money: How the World's Best Sports Bettors Beat the Bookies Out of Millions*. A frequent contributor to *Sport Literate*, MK's "Dodger Stadium Suite" is featured in the poetry collection *This Loss Behind Us* (Pint-Size Publications, 2018).