

# Chaper 25

In the morning, Grayson treated Maniac to breakfast in the baseball-equipment room, sharing an Egg McMuffin and orange juice. Maniac playfully reminded Grayson that he had gone to bed without a story the previous night. Grayson dismissed the idea, stating he had no stories, but when Maniac pressed, he revealed his past as a pitcher in the Minor Leagues, a fact that resonated with pride. This understanding of Grayson's past unveiled a different side to the old man, one filled with unspoken dreams and hidden talents. When Maniac asked for Grayson's first name, the old man responded with reluctance, saying it was Earl, but insisted on being called Grayson.

When Grayson returned at noon, he brought zeps and sodas, having promised to share a story about his Minor League days. He recounted his rookie experience with the Bluefield Bullets in West Virginia, which was "Class D," the lowest level in the Minor League system. Grayson described hitching a ride and arriving in Bluefield, only to be the victim of a practical joke when a gas station attendant told him his first meal would be free at the Blue Star restaurant for new players. Instead, Grayson found himself doing dishes for a hefty meal he had not paid for, missing his first game as a result.

Motivated by this humorous tale, Maniac decided to accompany Grayson to work, helping him with tasks around the park, where Grayson introduced him as his visiting nephew. As they worked together, they forged a bond over stories about Grayson's extensive Minor League career, filled with gritty realities—sleazy hotels, buses, and stadiums—interspersed with dreams of playing in the Majors and sincere memories of baseball.

Grayson spun tales of various teams and leagues, sharing moments that ranged from the joyous to the heartbreaking, including his almost fateful chance with the Toledo Mud Hens. He prayed for a good performance, but it ended poorly, leading to his subsequent descent in the baseball world. Despite hanging on for thirteen more years, he ultimately found himself out of baseball and life, reduced to sharing memories with a homeless boy—Maniac. Grayson's narratives were a rich tapestry of dreams long faded, revealing a lifetime of passion for the game that had ultimately left him adrift.