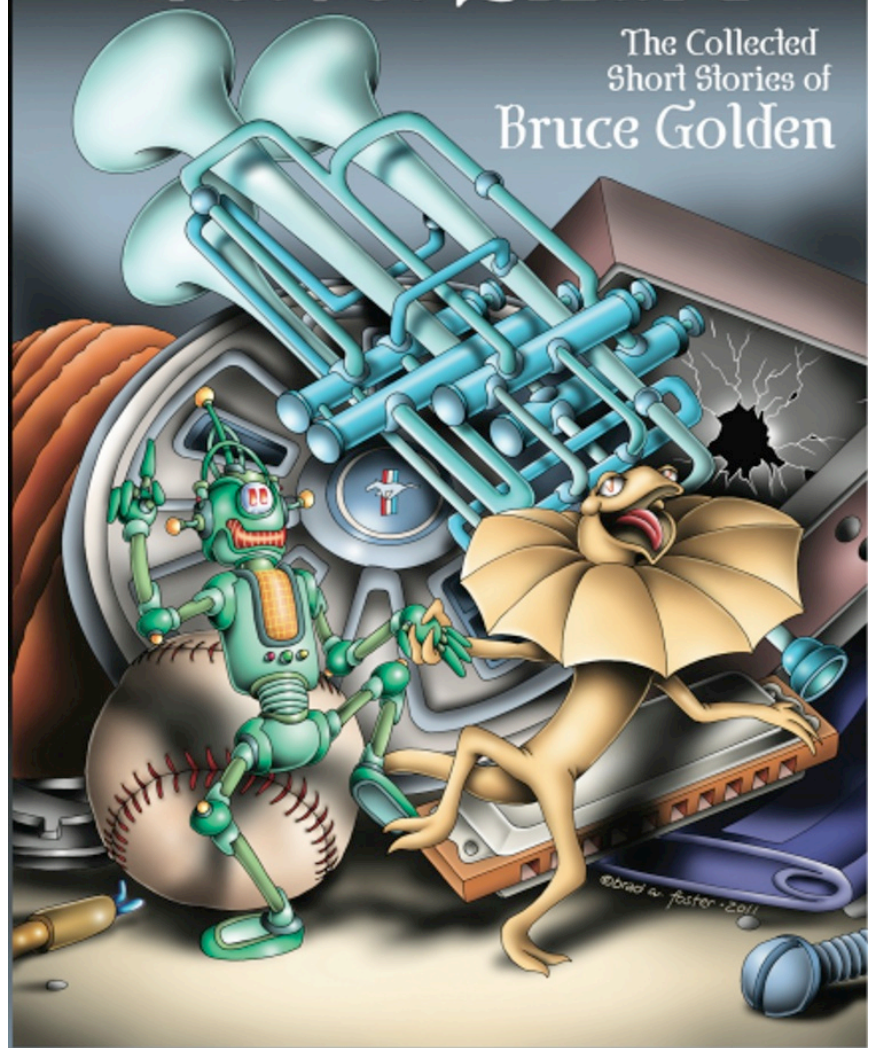


# Dancing with the Velvet Lizard

The Collected  
Short Stories of  
Bruce Golden





**DANCING**  
*with the*  
**VELVET**  
**LIZARD**

*The Collected Stories Of*  
**BRUCE GOLDEN**



ZUMAYA OTHERWORLDS

2011

AUSTIN TX

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DANCING WITH THE VELVET LIZARD

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*For*  
*Rod Serling*

*Maestro Of The Macabre*  
*Morality Tale*

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**DANCING**  
**WITH THE**  
**VELVET LIZARD**

## ONE OF NINE

I remember the first day I ever laid eyes on him. It didn't start too well for me, and it ended a helluva lot worse. Angie, the flavor of the month, dumped my ass before I'd even managed my morning coffee. And the shitty part of it was, I'd just started to get used to all her little idiosyncrasies.

After she blew out of my place on a storm cloud and a broomstick, I spent about ten minutes regretting whatever it was I must have done that pissed her off, and then got on with my life. By the top of the eighth, I couldn't even remember what it was about her I'd liked so much.

I was throwing pills, and we were up by one. We hadn't won many lately, so a one-run lead late was a big deal. There were two down, but there were two on, and I was jammed up behind a three-and-one count. I knew I had to throw a strike. Nakamura, my catcher, called for the heat. Problem was, my arm didn't feel like it had any heat left, so I shook him off.

I fingered the seams and caressed the leather cover, waiting for Nakamura's next sign. He put down the big deuce, and I shook him again. I didn't want to throw Uncle Charlie, I wanted the change, figuring I could throw something off-speed and fool the big gorilla who stood there waving the wood like he was gonna do some damage.

So, I threw it. It was a beautiful little pitch, except I elevated it about a foot, and he launched it over the big spaceship sticking out of the *See the Stars from Mars* ad on the right field wall. Talk about rockets. The next thing I know, we're down by two, and Hernandez is shooting out of the dugout like his ass is on fire.

"What kind of pitch was that?" he growled. "My mother could throw a better pitch than that!"

"Bring in your mother, then."

I thought it was a pretty funny comeback, but he wasn't laughing.

"You're outta here," he said, waving to the bullpen like he was directing traffic.

I walked to the dugout and slammed my glove against the wall, almost hitting poor old Coach Blutarski. Then I kicked the Energade container to make sure everyone knew I wasn't happy.

I sat at the end of the bench and pouted till we started to rally in the bottom of the ninth. I figured if we could at least tie it up, I wouldn't get hung with an-



other loss. Not exactly the old team spirit, but those were desperate days and I was struggling just to hang on.

The upshot is, the rally fell short and I took the loss. It was a quiet post-game locker room. I had coughed up yet another lead, along with any shot I had of being called up to the show. In fact, I figured I'd just punched my own ticket back to Double-A.

I'd been up and down so many times over the last few years I knew the hydrorail schedules by heart. You didn't have to be no genius genetic engineer to realize I wasn't living up to the "promise" the organization had touted when they first signed me. And my arm wasn't getting any younger.

It was time to start thinking about a second career, one that didn't include trying to throw a nine-inch sphere past the 240-pound behemoths they were sending up to the dish these days. It had been a helluva lot of fun when I was on top of my game, but the cheers had turned to jeers, and the lights didn't seem quite as bright anymore.

Sitting there, strapped with an ice pack, I saw old Coach Blutarski heading my way. I knew he was gonna try to play Mr. Rainbow to my blues, and I wasn't in the mood.

"Get 'em next time, Gabe," he said, patting me on my unprotected shoulder.

"Yeah, right."

The old-timer was about to shower me with more pearls of wisdom when *he* walked in.

He wasn't that tall, but you could tell he was put together—solid, you know? He had a little satchel and a big gear bag like we all carried, but I was sure he wasn't a player. I was sure because *what* he was, was obvious to anyone who could see the little metal gizmo attached to the side of his head. I would have figured he was just a new clubhouse drone, but he was all dressed up in what looked like his Sunday-best suit.

He just stood there like he was waiting for something. Several of the guys quit their yammering and stared at him. Then Santorini opened his big mouth, as he was prone to do, and said, "Those are some pretty fancy duds for cleaning toilets, aren't they, andy?"

That set off the first laughs I'd heard since I gave up the dinger.

But Hernandez must have had his earflaps set on high, because when he heard the laughing he came barreling out of his office ready to kick butt.

"Who the hell's laughing? You think being in goddamned last place is funny? I'll show you funny." He picked up a bat and was about to put a hole in the wall when he sees the andy standing there. "Who the hell are you?"

"I am Bill One-oh-Nine, your new catcher."

"The hell you say." Hernandez looked him up and down. "There are no andies in this league, bub, and I'll be damned if I'm going to have one on my team. Who the hell told you you were my catcher?"

"Someone's playing a joke on you, Skip," said Redtail, our second baseman.

"Nah," chimed in Santorini, "someone's playing a joke on the andy."

Just about everyone but Hernandez laughed. He made it plain with one of his patented scowls he was in no mood for it.

"Mr. Richard Boughtree tendered my contract," stated the andy.

“The GM gave you a contract?” Hernandez couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “I told him there was no way...well, we’ll see about that.”

The skipper stormed out of the room, headed for high country where management roosted.

Benny, the clubhouse drone, looked as confounded as the rest of us. He walked over to the new guy and took one of his bags.

“You better come with me,” he told the andy, and they walked out the back way.

If it was a joke, it wore out quicker than a 40-year-old relief pitcher. It wasn’t long before the laughter morphed into crude comments about andrones in general. Nakamura didn’t say anything, but you could tell by the snarl on his face he was thinking about being the odd man out. Hell, I’d be pissed, too, if I thought I was losing my job, especially to an andy.

“Damn andies are everywhere,” muttered someone.

“What makes that metalhead think he can play ball?”

“I ain’t playing with no andy, I can tell you that.”

You gotta understand, we didn’t mix with them. Not just ballplayers—no one. At least, no one I knew. We didn’t work with them, we didn’t socialize with them, and we certainly didn’t play ball with them. I’d heard of drone leagues where they played against each other—kind of a freak show, you know—but I’d never seen a game.

Don’t get me wrong. Personally, I had nothing against andrones, or “artificial persons,” as some of the media had begun calling them. They had their place. After all, somebody had to do the jobs regular people didn’t want to do. But baseball was a game for men—real men. When you step on that field you’re going to war, and you want guys who are gonna back you up. Guys you can trust. It didn’t matter to me what color a man was, or what country he was from, or his religion, or even his damn politics, as long as he kept it to himself, played hard and backed the team.

But a genetically-enhanced, artificial construct grown in a tank? That wasn’t a man. Whatever you called it, it didn’t belong on a ballfield.



“I’m sorry, son, that’s just the way it is.”

“Well, the way it is sucks!” shouted Nakamura, stalking out of Hernandez’s office. He flung his catcher’s mitt across the room, hitting Williams, the speed-burner just up from Double-A.

“Hey!” complained Williams. “Watch it.”

“I thought you were supposed to be fast, kid,” ragged Santorini with a chuckle.

I came in on the middle of it and didn’t hear the whole give-and-take between Nakamura and the skipper, but I had a bad feeling about the part I missed.

When I got to my locker, I noticed everyone pretending not to notice what was going on. Hernandez walked in, and I knew he must have been distracted, because he didn’t even yell at me for being late. The andy, Bill whatever, was sitting by a locker, putting on a uni.

“All right, listen up!” shouted Hernandez. I noticed most of the guys shut up quicker than normal. “Beginning tonight, Bill One-oh-Nine is going to be our

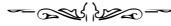
starting catcher.” The announcement was greeted by more than the usual amount of grumbling. “Quiet down! I don’t like it any more than the rest of you. I can tell you this—it’s a publicity stunt management thinks will put more butts in the seats. If you rejects weren’t playing like a bunch of scrubs, we wouldn’t have to deal with this, but you are, so deal with it!”

“Well, I ain’t gonna shower with it,” declared Santorini.

There was a murmur of agreement and another round of muffled curses aimed at andies in general and our new catcher in particular. All the while, this Bill just sat there, no expression on his face, listening to everything but not reacting.

“All right, dammit,” ordered the skipper, “let’s get out there and see if you can look like real ballplayers for a change.”

Bill grabbed his catcher’s gear and headed for the field. The guys watched him go, still carping. I saw they’d given the andy his own number—his andy number—even though teams normally never used anything higher than 99. But there it was on the back of his jersey, number 109. I didn’t know it then, but it was only the beginning of the circus to come.



A beautiful full moon floated over the park that night, like a hanging curve waiting to be clobbered. I guess I remember it so well because, for the first time since I’d been with the club, the stands were almost full. The place was infested with media-types, and I could hear the buzz of anticipation in the crowd.

Management had gotten the word out, and their marketing ploy looked like gold from where I stood. It didn’t seem to matter whether people liked the idea or hated it, they wanted to see the andy play ball. And, being it was the first time one had ever played with real men, I guess it was kind of historic.

The team’s little PR geek was going crazy trying to satisfy everyone. He looked like he was gonna have a nervous breakdown when Hernandez ordered the media off the field earlier than usual because they were getting in the way. Bill seemed to take the experience in stride—going about his business with BP and infield, giving short but polite answers to all the reporters’ questions till they were shooed away.

I guess the guys on the other team hadn’t gotten the word, because they were surprised to see Bill. But it wasn’t long before they were on him like a rookie on a forty-credit hooker. Ballplayers can be vicious—even with their own—even when they like a guy. So, you can imagine they weren’t lobbing any change-ups at this andy. They were coming in high and tight with their best stuff.

“Look at the andy. Did you ever see a goofier mug? Look at those ears. Hey, andy, do you use those ears for hitting?”

“You think that andy’s gonna hit you, Robeson?”

“He can kiss my black ass and he still won’t get a hit.”

“Hey, tin man, you forgot your mop!”

“That sonofabitch better not get in my way.”

“He’s not a sonofabitch, he’s a son of a tube.”

“Yeah, a test tube.”

“Go back to your vat, metalhead.”

Once the game started, things calmed down, and it was pretty much baseball as usual—till Bill came to bat in the bottom of the third. Hernandez had put him eighth in the lineup, and there was one out and nobody on.

“Now batting,” announces the PA guy, “Bill One-oh-Nine.” There was some scattered polite applause, but mostly it was drowned out by an onslaught of boos.

There wasn't much suspense. I think most everybody in both dugouts knew what was coming next, even if the spectators didn't. The first pitch drilled Bill right between the shoulder blades. Their pitcher, Robeson, wasn't known for his control, so I figured he was actually aiming for the andy's head.

Bill didn't seem hurt, though. He trotted down to first without so much as a glance at the mound.

Now, usually when the other pitcher plunks your guy and you know it's a purpose pitch, you gotta hit one of their guys. It's a matter of protecting your own. But there was no quid pro quo that night, even though they hit the andy with the first pitch each time he stepped to the plate.

It was a tight one, and although Gustafson, who was on the mound for us, kept shaking off Bill's signs, we were winning. By the ninth, we were hanging on to a one-run lead when they tried to steal. The andy threw an absolute laser down to second to nail the guy. It was such a helluva throw guys on both teams were left with their mouths hanging open. Game over. We went away with the W.



The next night—different team, same attitude. The first time up, their pitcher planted a fastball just above the andy's knee. The next time he got beaned. I guess they thought if they kept hitting him he'd quit. But he didn't get mad. He didn't charge the mound or even flash the pitcher a dirty look. Each time, he just shook it off and hustled down to first. You had to admire the guy. He was tough.

In the sixth, with the game tied and the sacks juiced, Bill walked to the plate and there was no place to put him. Their pitcher glanced into the dugout with that “what'll I do?” look. What could they do but pitch to him?

At that point, I was thinking, if he's any kind of ballplayer he's got a lot of frustration built up. Sure enough, the andy swung at the first pitch and hammered it over the centerfield fence.

Some of the guys on the bench were so caught up in the moment they started whooping and hollering. Then they noticed Nakamura sitting there looking pissed and quieted down. When Bill came trotting back to the dugout, they ignored him.

“Lucky swing,” said Santorini to no one in particular.

Bill just started putting on his gear.

Now if you never played, you probably don't know how humbling a game this is. Nobody in the game succeeds as much as they fail. The secret is in handling the failure—never getting too high or too low, no matter what happens. I looked at the andy, thinking he's got the perfect makeup. How could a regular human, all twisted up inside with pride and fear and insecurity, ever hope to compete with him?

The post-game antics were upbeat that night, as they always were when we won. The clubhouse sound system was blasting, and you could hardly hear yourself think over the commotion. Even old Blutarski moved lively, which made me

think he'd taken a nip or two from that bottle everyone knew he had hidden in his locker.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I struck out the great Max Dinty?" said Blutarski to several of the guys who were standing there shooting the shit.

"Yeah, yeah, Blotto, you've told us a hundred times," mocked Santorini. "Why don't you come up with some new stories, old man."

Blutarski looked like someone had kicked him in the gut. He shut up and walked out. Most of the guys were so busy horsing around, they didn't even notice. I felt sorry for the old-timer. I guess I could see myself in him, thirty or forty years down the road.

I didn't feel much like partying—I guess because I was still getting over what's-her-name. So, I made excuses when the guys headed out and decided to give my arm a little whirlpool session. I stepped into the training room. Bill 109 was in one of the tubs, which didn't surprise me—not with the beating he'd been taking.

"Good game," I said nonchalantly.

"Thank you."

I cranked up the tub and got in, feeling a little awkward because I'm in there with this andy. I didn't know why, exactly. I was just uncomfortable.

After a few minutes of silence, he said out of nowhere, "I do not understand why they hate me."

"Why who hates you?"

"Everyone—the other players. They act and talk as if they hate me."

It may have been obvious to me, but the andy didn't have a clue.

"Look, it's bad enough when some rookie, some *human* rookie, comes up looking to take away your job. You being a drone makes it all that much worse."

"I do not want to take anyone's job. I only want to play."

"Well, that's the nature of the game, Bubba. You play well enough and you're gonna push somebody else to the bench. In your case, management forced the skipper's hand, so you didn't even earn it. That's some downright foul-smelling shit."

"I would have preferred to earn it," he said. "But how do you earn it if you are never given the chance? Until now, I have never had that chance. No androne has ever had such an opportunity."

I didn't have anything to say to that, so we were both quiet for a while.

I go to wondering, though.

"How did you start playing ball?" I asked him.

He hesitated.

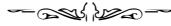
"I have always loved baseball. Since I saw my first game I have loved it. I am intrigued by its intricacies. I am fascinated by the symmetry of its mathematics, the encounter of pitcher versus batter versus defense. The ebb and flow of all the possible permutations each time an out is recorded, each time the count changes. The balance and beauty of it is a master stroke of human conception."

I'd been around the game my whole life, and I'd never heard it described quite like that.

"Why do *you* play?" he asked me.

I didn't have anything near as flowery to follow-up what he'd said. I didn't want to try. So, I just told the truth.

"It was the only thing I was ever any good at."



We went on the road after that, and the boos and curses rained down on Bill like hits in a 15-inning slugfest. But he just kept right on keeping on, even when the guys played a pretty mean trick on him.

He'd come back to his locker one night to find his clothes all gone. In their place was a clown outfit—big floppy shoes, baggy red-and-green-striped balloon pants, a tie with a big plastic flower on it. We were minutes away from loading up the bus, so he didn't have a choice. I had to admit, it was hilarious.

Not that it was that unusual. The old-timers were always playing practical jokes on the rookies—making them dress like women or something goofy—just good-natured ribbing. I'd never seen a clown outfit used before, but it wasn't that far off-base. Then again, that wasn't the end of it. After we got on the bus, I saw Bill scratching himself. Not just a little, but like a dog in a field of fleas. He was going so crazy the driver had to stop. Bill practically flew off that bus, tearing off his clown clothes as he went. Everyone, including me, was dying. We were busting up so much it hurt. I think the skipper even pulled a muscle laughing.

It turned out Santorini put some kind of itching powder in Bill's circus suit. Knowing Santorini, I know he had nothing good-natured in mind. He was just plain mean.

Yet Bill never said a thing. Benny doused him with a bucket of water, and he wore his uni till he could buy some new threads.

I think it was about then Bill started to score a little respect—at least from some of the guys. Of course, it didn't hurt he was batting over .400 and throwing out almost every runner who tried to steal. And they tried. Each team set their sights on Bill. If they weren't decking him when he came to bat, they were trying to make him look bad behind the plate. He took everything they dished out and gave plenty back. I even saw Nakamura walk up to him once when he thought nobody was watching and say, "You're one helluva catcher."

Not only was Bill hitting like a sonuvabitch and doing a great job catching, he even helped me turn it around.

It was the second inning of the first game he caught me, and I was already in trouble. Two runs in, two more on, and Bill calls time. Of course the boo birds were on him like flies on shit as he walked out to the mound.

I already had a bad case of flop sweat, and my mouth felt like I'd been sucking on a resin bag. My career was in trouble, and at that moment, I was thinking the last thing I need is for some metalhead to come out and tell me how to pitch. I stood there, hands on hips, giving him my best glare. I held out my glove for the ball, but he ignored it.

"Gabe, you are tipping your pitches."

"What?"

"Each time you are going to throw your curveball, it is obvious you are adjusting your grip. When I call for the change-up you invariably look at the ground before you begin your delivery. I believe the other team has noticed this also."

“No wonder they’re tearing me a new one. All right, get back there, and I’ll give them a new look.”

“According to our scouting report, we should work the next batter low and inside with fastballs and then go away with—”

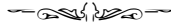
“Yeah, yeah, go on. Get back there.”

He did, and I made sure I didn’t give away any more pitches. We ended up winning when Bill hit a two-out single in the ninth.

Yeah, we were on a roll, and Bill was a big part of it. At least he was a big part of our turnaround on the field. Off the field was a different story.

Every night after the game we’d either go out somewhere or go back to the hotel and pack for the next trip. But I’d never see Bill. I knew he didn’t room with anyone on the team, but I wasn’t sure if he even stayed in the same hotels. I never knew where he went when he wasn’t with the team. Maybe they had droney bars or something.

I guess I could have asked him what he did. I could have invited him to join us. But I never did. It didn’t seem to bother him, though. He just kept on playing ball.



“You keep playing like this, and you’re gonna need some kind of nickname.”

We were batting in the top of the seventh, and I made a point to go sit by Bill, who was usually alone on the bench. He already had a double and a dinger. The third time up they hit him.

I was thinking about how good he was playing, and it occurred to me that Bill 109 was no name for a ballplayer.

“What do you mean ‘nickname?’”

“Well, Bill isn’t much of a name. Didn’t anyone ever call you Billy?”

“No.”

“What about Willie?”

“No.”

“Shit, even Will would be better than Bill.”

“I do not understand. Bill seems an acceptable designation to me. Why would I want to change it?”

“You know—to make you seem more like one of the guys, more...human,” I said, and immediately regretted it. I tried to cover myself. “It’s all about style, about flair, about—”

I never finished, because at that moment Santorini hit a two-hopper their first sacker had to dive for. Their pitcher raced over to cover the bag, and Santorini ran like a bat out of hell to beat him to first.

The ball, the pitcher and Santorini all arrived at the same time. I heard this sickening crack that no ballplayer wants to hear. Suddenly, they were all on the ground—the ball, the pitcher and Santorini.

The ump waved him safe, called for time then frantically motioned to the dugout for help. Bill and I stepped up to look as Hernandez and the trainer ran out.

Their pitcher got up, but Santorini was going spastic, pounding the ground with his fist.

“Get a stretcher!” yelled Hernandez.

Me and a couple of the guys ran out to help, and I saw this jagged piece of bloody bone sticking out of Santorini's leg. A quick glimpse was all I got, because I had to look away. By then, Santorini was bawling. Redtail was standing next to me. He puked on my cleats.

Now, Santorini was nobody's favorite player, but when a guy gets hurt like that, everybody feels for him. It's not that ballplayers are such a compassionate lot. It's that they're scared—scared it could happen to them and glad it didn't.

By the time they were shooting him full of painkillers and getting him on the stretcher, most of the guys had moved off a ways so they didn't have to watch. I was still standing there when Bill walked over and knelt next to Santorini, who was either in shock or feeling the painkillers kick in, because his eyes were glazed over and he had shut up.

"Do not worry," Bill said, real gentle-like, "you will be able to come back and play again."

They carried Santorini away, and I walked over to Bill.

"You really meant that, didn't you?"

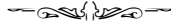
"Yes," said Bill. "The biotechnology exists to repair his injury. He will play again, if he wants to."

"No, I meant you were sincere. You were really trying to make him feel better."

"Yes. It seemed like the humane thing to do."

"You mean the *human* thing to do."

"Yes," said Bill. "That, too."



Weeks later, we'd actually climbed to the top of the division. I'd won seven straight and lowered my ERA to around a buck-and-a-half. I was going for number eight and there was no score when their pitcher decided to bean Bill.

He got hit hard. I'm talking dead on the helmet. He went down, and for half a minute, I didn't think he was gonna get up. The trainer started out, but Bill got back on his feet and headed for first, only a touch wobbly.

He's batting .440, so at that point I didn't know if they're hitting him because he's an andy or because they're afraid to pitch to him. I didn't care. Either way, that shit was getting old. Even Redtail jumped up and started jawing at their pitcher.

We didn't score, and I took the mound in the bottom of the ninth. First batter, first pitch, I nailed him but good. His teammates started shouting all kinds of shit. I ignored them.

They bunted the runner to second, but I whiffed the next guy. However, their cleanup hitter was up next, and he played pepper with the left-field wall. My winning streak was over.

I walked off the field as the other team slapped hands and generally whooped it up. Bill approached me.

"Intentionally throwing a pitch at their batter with the score tied was not a strategically sound move, Gabe."

"No, but it felt good," I said with a big grin on my face.

Shit if he didn't flash this big andy smile right back at me.



“Reilly!” Hernandez waved me over. I figured he was gonna ream me out for losing the game. “Pack your shit, you’re going up.”

“Going up where?”

“They’ve called you up. It seems the big club is so desperate for pitching they’re even willing to take a chance on your tired old arm.”

That froze me like a southpaw with a good pick-off move. They were calling me up to the show? *I wanted to believe it, but...*

“Seriously, Skip?”

“Serious as shit. You’d better get your ass moving. You’ve got a flight to catch. They want you in San Diego by tomorrow morning.”

The next thing you know, I was jamming stuff into my bag like I can’t think straight, because I can’t. All those old doubts started creeping into my head—all those shitty insecurities. Bill snapped me out of it, though. He walked up as I packed and held out his hand.

“Congratulations, Gabe.”

I shook his hand quick-like. I don’t know why, but I felt guilty. I was finally getting the chance I had worked for my whole life, but...

I realized what was bothering me.

“Hell, Bill, you’re the one that should be going up.”

“I do not think they are quite ready for an *andy* in the major leagues.”

“Yeah, well, the way you’re playing, it won’t be long.”

“Maybe soon, then, we will play together again.”

“You can play ball with me anytime, Bill.”

“In the meantime,” he said, “I will give some consideration to a nickname.”

“Gonna work on that human thing, huh?” I replied with a big smile.

He shrugged.

I had zipped up my bag, ready to bounce out of there, when old Blutarski walked up.

“Going up to the bigs, eh?” He put his arm around my shoulder, and I got a serious blast of booze breath. “Way to go, kid.” I was on the far side of twenty-eight, but to coach Blutarski everyone was a kid. “Did I ever tell you about the time I was up in the show and struck out the great Max Ginty?”

“Sorry, Coach, I’d love to hear it again, but I’ve got a shuttle to catch.”

Disappointment colored his face. What could I do, I had to run.

“You struck out Max Ginty?” said Bill to old Blutto. “I am unfamiliar with that particular game, Coach Blutarski. Could you tell me what happened?”

“Well, kid, it was like this...”



That was the last time I ever saw Bill 109. When I got to the big club, I tried to convince them to call him up, but they weren’t interested. They had a good catcher and didn’t think some career minor leaguer should be making roster moves for them. So, I shut my mouth and pitched. I actually threw pretty well for the next couple of seasons, till my arm blew out.

Of course, nowadays, andrones (within certain genetic specifications) are commonplace in prime time. Everyone knows the story of Eric 79, the flashy shortstop who broke the “artificial barrier,” as the media called it.

Bill, though, never did get his shot at the bigs. I heard he kicked around playing ball in the minors and ended up back in the droney leagues. Someone told me he'd read where Bill's cranial implant malfunctioned and gave him a stroke. I even heard a rumor he served some time in prison. The story goes he got drunk one night, lost his temper and nearly beat a man to death in a bar fight. One version says it started because of an argument over some annie.

I don't believe it, though. I can't imagine Bill ever getting drunk, let alone losing his temper like that. At least, I'd like to think he never became that human.



Baseball is one of the loves of my life. I've written two baseball-related stories; one ("Reckoning") is the story I've sold, by far, more often than any other. The other, this one, is the first piece of fiction I ever sold. Before being published, "One of Nine" was awarded an honorable mention as a semi-finalist in L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future contest. It's loosely a companion piece to my first novel, *Mortals All*—different characters, but set in the same world (although years later), where humans grown in tanks (andrones) are considered less than human. Originally published in the short-lived British journal *Colonies Science Fiction* under the title "That Human Thing," it was published again, six years later as "One of Nine" in the more prestigious British magazine *Postscripts*, and as a mini e-book by Damnation Books.

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For review: [publicity@zumayapublications.com](mailto:publicity@zumayapublications.com)