

Hard Ball with George

by Jan MacLean

My oldest sister, Tinker, and her new husband, George, are living with us till they find an apartment. George is 23, Tinker's 21, I'm 9 years old. People guess me to be five because I'm about 47 inches tall and weigh about 51 pounds.

My brothers, the neighborhood kids and I often play ball, "up the field," after supper. This night, George decides he's gonna play with us.

When we divide up the teams, he says, "Birdie's not playing, is she?" Ronny says, "Ya, she's playing. We need her to even up the sides." (Which is the only time I get to play.)

"We can play without her," George says. "She's too little, what can she do? I'd rather have fewer players than have her screw us up. We'll definitely lose with her on our team."

"No sa," I yell to him. "Whadda YOU know? You've never seen me play."

Ronny, 13, says, "Shuddup, Birdie. I'll decide who's comin' and who's goin'!"

"Well, I don't wan' 'er on my team," George says.

"She's already on ya team. You can take it or leave it."

Wow!!! Ronny's sticking up for me? That's a switch.

"Iz that right?" George says, stepping forward.

Paulie, 12, and Jerry, my twin, say, "Yeah, its the way we always do it.."

"Ok, We'll see," he says. "Let's play."

My hands are sweaty, my heart's pounding. Oh Brother, I'm really gonna have to prove myself here.

George is covering first base. Paulie's covering short stop and second. I'm third baseman. Ronny is pitching, and Jerry and Jimmy are playing right and left field. I don't have a glove. There aren't enough to go around.



Ronny tells me, "You won't need a glove. You won't be doing that much."

George catches a fly ball between first and 2nd base. It's an out. The next thing I know, I see this ball flying fast and hard at my head. I duck.

"See. See. I told cha," George starts yelling. "I told cha she couldn't do it. Look at ha, she ducks for God's sakes. She's a real plus to this team, isn't she?"



"Why did you even throw the ball to me? There's no one on base. I didn't expect ya to throw it."

Ronny's yelling from the pitcher's mound, "What the hell are ya doin' George. Why'd cha throw the ball to her?"

"I was testing 'er. And she failed. She ducks for cripes sake."

"Ya threw it right at my head. You'd duck, too."

"Ya right!" he says. "Ya have to always be ready. That's what the game's all about."

"He's right, Birdie," says Ronny. "Ya do that again and you're out of the game." I wrinkle my face in disgust, roll my eyes and shake my head from left to right.

"And George, you didn't need to wing the ball like that, either," heads.

"Is that right?" George asks.

Paulie, Jerry, Jimmy and Charlie MacLeod yell back, "Yeah, George, that's right."

Wow, everyone's stickin' up for me. They sound tough and strong. I feel powerful.

The game goes on. There was a kid on first. George chases a fly ball to right field and catches it. He throws the ball to me. I catch it and tag the runner out. My team's yelling, "Way da' go, Birdie. Good play." They throw a fist in the air and jump up and down.



"She was lucky," George says. "Wait'll she gets up at bat. We'll see."

When I'm at bat, I almost always get walked. I bend over the plate like I see the boys doing, making it difficult for the pitcher to throw the ball between my shoulders and knees for a strike.

Ronny yells to me, “Remember, Birdie, keep your eye on the ball. Let 'em walk ya.”

I want so much to hit that ball, but I’m scared. If I miss, they’ll kill me. They’ll call me stupid and say, “I told cha not to strike at the ball. Now look at what cha did.”

As always, I get walked. “Way da go, Birdie, that’s watching it,” my team yells and hoots as I walk to first base. “Big deal,” I wanna say.

When the game is over, George is standing near first base, I’m on third. He yells, “Quick, Birdie, see if you can catch this one.” He throws the ball at me, so fast I have no time to think. I catch the ball with my bare hands. It pushes me back a few feet and burns like I’ve stuck it in hot water. Within seconds, my hand puffs up to twice its size. By the time I walk across the field and back to my house, my right hand is black and blue. The pain travels up my arm and across my shoulders. I say nothing. I sneak some ice from the refrigerator, go to my room, lay the ice on a towel and carefully hold my hand over it till the throbbing subsides.

Geez, my sister’s married to this guy.



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