An Angel in Rossmoor

By Karen Gardner

The score was 5 to 5 in the 9th inning and the Angel's pitching was crap as usual. They had a big lead and lost it all in half an inning. Typical Anaheim boys of summer stinking to high heaven in the 90-degree sun. The bullpen was active with whomever was going to be called on next to save, or rather hold. I see Parker warming up. I don't know who that little skinny one is warming up next to him. Probably a last-minute trade from Loserville. I hate paying $10.00 for a rubbery hot dog when the Angels lose.

Last pitch for the current weakling. It's a ball of course. The enemy gets a leisurely walk to first base as the coach picks up the phone in the dugout for a new pitcher. Bases loaded. Two outs. We're about to lose again. This hot dog sucks. The skinny little one is making his way out the gate. The staff rolls the gate partially open as the crowd seated near the gate starts making a weird murmuring sound. Then the next section starts making the same sound. They're collectively gasping and pointing at the new pitcher like he's got a snake crawling up his back. Then I get a glimpse of what's approaching the mound. It's a girl. *No. Way. In. Hell.* It's a girl! The crowd is either moaning, in silent shock, or cheering. Actually, the only ones cheering are a smidgen of females looking euphoric as if they're cheering on their own daughter. That's perfect! Just when you think they can't make any more pitching mistakes, they top themselves. The entire stadium is on its feet, but no one is making a sound as she begins her warm up throws. Mike Scioscia, the Angel's manager, is staring at her from the bottom of the bill of his cap. The entire team looks nervous. The score board is showing no background on her so the people around me are frantically tapping on their phones, hoping Google can make sense out of this horrific mess. They start shouting their search results out loud. *It's some girl from a town called Rossmoor. What? Where's that? It's Los Alamitos. Yeah, it says here she went to high school at Los Alamitos High. Graduated in 2014.*

"This is a man's game!" a nearby fan shouted as he rested his hands on his beer belly.

“Go home honey!” shouted another.

“Shut up!” snapped a woman in front of him. “You don’t even know if she’s good or not yet!”

“Yeah, right.” He replied under his breath.

She started her wind up literally in slow motion. She gradually stretched her arm in back of her and then slowly brought it forward, barely releasing the ball so it only fell a few feet in front of her. She then slowly folded her body in half in front of her still standing on one leg like a ballerina imitating a flamingo, then slowly folded up again like a flamingo imitating a ballerina. The ball didn’t even make it half way to the catcher. We all stood in stunned silence. Was this a joke?

She did it again. Still in slow motion, but this time the ball went a little farther.

She did it again. A bit faster, and a bit farther. She was now making it about three quarters of the way to the catcher, who just squatted behind home plate letting the balls just roll to a stop on the grass.

She did it again. Her movement was almost at normal speed. The pitch was still slow, but this time she made it in the catcher’s mitt. There was a smattering of applause.

She did it again. This time it was fast and her body motions now looked like a rubber band flinging back and forth as she released the ball. It was weird. Like a combination of baseball, modern dance and yoga.

She nodded to the umpire that she was ready to go.

The batter walked up, chuckling as he lifted the bat behind his shoulder. Her slow pitching was just like batting practice. He’ll hit it right out of the park. She’s about to make history. The first woman to pitch in the Bigs and she’s going to throw a 50 mile an hour estrogen bomb that he’ll smack to kingdom come. Stupidest team in history.

She did it again. This time she let it all go. She was at full speed flinging her body in that rubber band motion like a Cirque du Soleil acrobat. The ball went so fast it looked like it was sucked into the catcher's mitt. The batter's smirk turned to shock as he watched the ball dive past him. The scoreboard showed it was 90 MPH.

"Strike!" the umpire gulped.

Mike Scioscia grinned.

She did it again. "Strike two!" the umpire yelled.

The batter was no longer chuckling and was anxious in his stance.

She did it again. "Strike three!" the umpire shouted as he motioned that the batter was out.

There was a high-pitched cacophony coming from the stands. It was mostly women, Angel's fans and opposing team fans alike, yelling and jumping.

No one was sure what to make of it. She stopped three runs from coming in so now we get another chance with extra innings. I like that part, but how long could she last in this sport? Was this a fluke? A sideshow? A fleeting moment in history? A door opened?

I turned and looked at a few guys around me and smiled. "That was kind of cool," I said. "Gentlemen, I think we were just first-hand witnesses to history."

They nodded and smiled as we all started clapping a hesitant tribute. "Ok, ok, let's go Angels!" I shouted. The fans started a tentative clap and then as it sunk in, the acknowledgment escalated into an emotional roar. Everyone was high-fiving friends and strangers alike. I continued eating the best hot dog I've ever tasted in my life.