



# THEATRA GI

UP  
CLOSE

**Historical Fiction** In this story, fictional characters attend a real historical event. Look for details the author includes to help you understand the setting and event.

I shoved my hand into the baseball mitt, buttery soft and worn at the seams. It had been my pop's, and it was too big for me. Mitts should fit snug on your hand, but mine would plop to the ground if I didn't spread or grip my fingers on the inside. It didn't matter, though—I could still catch just fine with it. I loved the feel of a fastball smacking into my palm. Pop used to practice with me every night after he came home from the bottling plant on Fort Street.

**But then one day he'd come home looking like a hangdog**, heading straight to the kitchen table, shoulders slumped. I had waited in the doorway, mitt clutched in my hands, until my mother shooed me out of the room and shut the door. When I pressed my ear up against the thin wall, I was able to make out bits and pieces of what they said. The worst being that my father had lost his job.

We hadn't practiced anymore after that. And a few weeks later, Pop hopped a train out of town. He'd have better luck looking for work elsewhere—the Great Depression had hit Chattanooga, and all of Tennessee, hard.

Remembering that, I gave my gloved palm a soft punch.

"Thataboy!" came a voice from the lot next door. I could hear Timmy Oglethorpe and some friends playing. It had been so long since I'd caught a ball, my right arm practically itched. I stretched my fingers wide inside the glove and wandered out our back door.

"Need an outfielder?" I called over.

Timmy shaded his eyes and scowled. "You mean . . . you?"

"Why not?" I crossed my arms, hugging the mitt to my chest. "I'm a darned good fielder."

"No, Hazel. Girls can't play baseball," one of Timmy's friends said with a laugh. They turned their attention back to their game.

**I pulled the glove off my hand and stomped back inside, shivering less at the late afternoon chill than at the nerve of them.**

### WORD CHOICE

The author chooses old-fashioned words—like *hangdog*—that help create the 1930s setting. Find three other old-fashioned words or phrases in the story.



### CHARACTER

What does this tell you about what Hazel thinks of the boys' attitudes? What does it tell you about Hazel?

# BRILL!

In the midst of the Great Depression, Hazel has high hopes about a special baseball game

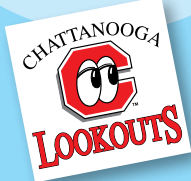
BY REBECCA BEHRENS | ART BY ANTHONY FOTI

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our 1930s  
Time Machine  
video!



## INFERENCE

This line helps you infer that the Lookouts were a minor-league team. How do you think the game would give Chattanooga extra pep?



## GENRE

Notice how the author introduces real people and events into the story. This is the *historical* part of historical fiction! Why might the author want to tell about this episode?



## CHARACTER

What does this scene tell you about Hazel?

**A**pril 1, 1931: a real April Fool's joke on us in Chattanooga, as torrents of rain flooded town and canceled the big baseball game. The Lookouts were supposed to play against the New York Yankees. **Any chance to see them battle a major-league team would give our city a little extra pep**—but this game was even more special, and not because of the Yankees. The big news was that now the Lookouts had a girl pitcher!

Thankfully the skies had cleared, so April 2 the game would go on—and I felt like just about the luckiest gal as I headed down O'Neal Street toward Engel Stadium, ticket clutched in my hand.

Of course, it was sheer luck that I had a ticket at all. Since Pop had left, my mother pinched our pennies even tighter. There was barely need to rinse out jars when they were emptied—every little lick of peanut butter or jelly had already been scraped out. When you can't afford bacon, you can't buy baseball tickets.

But after the April Fool's game got rained out, Mr. Oglethorpe couldn't miss work to see it played the next day. Mrs. Oglethorpe came over to see if we had use for a ticket. Before she could give it to my little brother, I asked, "Could I take the ticket? You read the papers, right? **The Lookouts have hired a girl to pitch! Jackie Mitchell, in her very first game.** She has real moxie!"

Mrs. Oglethorpe tsked, either at my language or the thought of a girl pitching. But she *did* give me the ticket.

I wasn't but halfway to the stadium when I heard a familiar voice calling after me. "Hazel! I heard you've got our extra ticket!"

I whirled around, face-to-face with Timmy Oglethorpe. I supposed I should thank him, even if it pained me to do so. "Yes, and I am very grateful for it."

Timmy fell into step with me. I tried to walk as fast as I could, just to make his short legs have to work harder. Unfortunately, he was pretty good at keeping up. "I hope you're ready to see just why you can't play ball with us boys."

I shot him a look. "And why is that?"

"That girl's gonna make a fool out of herself."

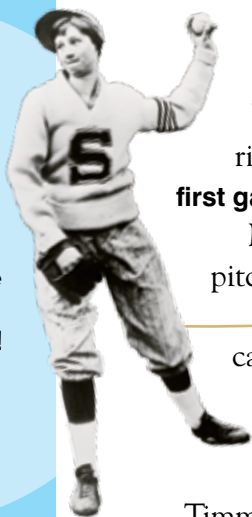
"Jackie Mitchell? Nah. With that curveball of hers, she'll strike 'em out."

He snorted. "You really think a 17-year-old girl pitcher is going to strike out Babe Ruth?"

I straightened my shoulders. "I really do."

"Well. If you're right about that, then you can play with us after all."

**"I'm going to make you shake on that, just so you can't weasel out of this after Jackie blows them away."**



Timmy and I stopped on the sidewalk, and I shook his grimy hand. Then we raced the rest of the distance to join the crowds streaming into the stadium. I didn't doubt that Jackie could do it, but I still found myself wishing real hard that she'd do me—and all of Chattanooga—proud.

**B**eggars can't be choosers, but our seats were not the best. To get a good view, I had to sit on the very edge of mine and press my fingertips into the wood, pushing myself to sit as straight and tall as possible. If I craned my neck and the man in front of me bent down to study his program, I could see the pitcher's mound. But even though my view wasn't perfect, the happy noises from the crowd and the smells of popcorn and frankfurters were.

Next to me, Timmy waved his arms madly to get the attention of a vendor. **He hemmed and hawed about whether to spend his nickel on peanuts or Cracker Jack, eventually picking the red and white box.** "I wonder what I'll get inside for the prize," he said. I thought about the last time I'd gotten to fish around in a box for a baseball card or trinket. I didn't have a nickel—the game would have to be treated enough. I turned away and squinted down at the field. What I saw made me gasp.

"What?" Timmy sprayed a mouthful of molasses and popcorn dangerously close to my face.

I pointed at the field, where I could see a tall man and a round man, both in the unmistakable pinstripes of the Yankee uniform. **"That's Babe Ruth! And over there's Lou Gehrig!"** The Yankees were on the field, warming up. For a fleeting moment, I thought about how excited Pop would be to see these great players.

Moments later, I gasped a second time as the girl of the hour emerged onto the field. Her entrance sent hoots and hollers through the crowd, and people jumped up and down like popcorn as they tried to get a better look. Scrambling to my feet, I struggled to get a decent vantage point. Then I saw her, slim and dwarfed by her blousy, loose baseball uniform. Her hair, cropped under the cap with a big Chattanooga C on it, was almost as short as a boy's. Yet Jackie was all girl, with a pretty smile that she flashed at the roaring crowd as she waved.

Flanked by important-looking men, she made her way to the mound to warm up. Before Jackie threw out a ball, she stood and posed for the cameras, even pulling out a make-up compact and daintily powdering her nose. That made Timmy go into hysterics. Gehrig and Ruth, along with everyone else, watched as Jackie tested out her fastball. I couldn't read their faces from so far away. But I imagine they were worried—because, boy oh boy, could she pitch.

Finally, the game started. In a tizzy, I kept at the edge of my

## SETTING

Which details in this paragraph add to creating the time period?



## INFERENCE

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig are two of the all-time greats of baseball. How does seeing them affect Hazel?





## COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Jackie reminds us of Little League star Mo'ne Davis, who pitched a shutout game in the Little League World Series last summer. How are Jackie and Mo'ne similar?



seat. The stands grew quiet; I could hear Timmy gnawing on his Cracker Jack next to me. First up was Babe Ruth. I peered down at Jackie, standing tall on the mound. How she hadn't melted into a puddle of nerves, standing there and facing the legend, I couldn't understand. I crossed my fingers for her.

Jackie wound up her left arm like the crank on an ice-cream churn, then finally let loose with her sinker. Ball. She wound up again and pitched. That time, Ruth swung and missed. The third time, he missed again—and, looking huffy, called the umpire over to inspect the ball. Jackie stood on the mound, cool as a cucumber. My heart fluttered. The umpire walked away, and Jackie wound up her slender arm to pitch one more time. I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Timmy. He wasn't eating anymore, but watching the action on the field slack-jawed.

Jackie's fourth pitch painted the outside corner—strike! The stands erupted. Ruth flung his bat in anger, then stomped off the field in a snit.

**I don't know if I've ever been prouder of someone in my whole life than I was of Jackie Mitchell in that moment.**

In his shock, Timmy dropped his Cracker Jack box on the sticky stadium floor, spilling popcorn and peanuts along with maybe some misplaced pride.

Up next was Lou Gehrig, who swung and missed three straight pitches. He left the field with a little more dignity. The third batter, Tony Lazzeri, walked, and then the manager called Jackie off the field. Waving, she blew a kiss to the delighted crowd as she was led away, and my heart soared.

Triumphant, I turned to Timmy. "Thatagirl!"

**A**fter school the next day, I heard "Batter up!" echo from the lot next door. I ran to the closet and grabbed my mitt. I slid my fingers in, closing my eyes and picturing Jackie standing tall on the field the day before. I stepped out into the backyard and walked over to Timmy and his friends, with my shoulders thrown back and head held high.

"Hey, girlie, go home," that same nitwitted friend called out to me.

Timmy shook his head, though. **"Nope—after that killer-diller Lookouts game, she can join us."**

To that scowling boy, I smiled and waved, just like Jackie Mitchell had to the crowd. "I'm ready to play ball." 📢



## PLOT

How has Timmy changed? How is Hazel's problem resolved?

## WRITE TO WIN

What historical facts do you learn from this story? Think about the events and setting, and explain at least three things you learned in a well-written paragraph. Send it to "Thatagirl Contest" by Jan. 15, 2015. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *When Audrey Met Alice* by Rebecca Behrens.

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