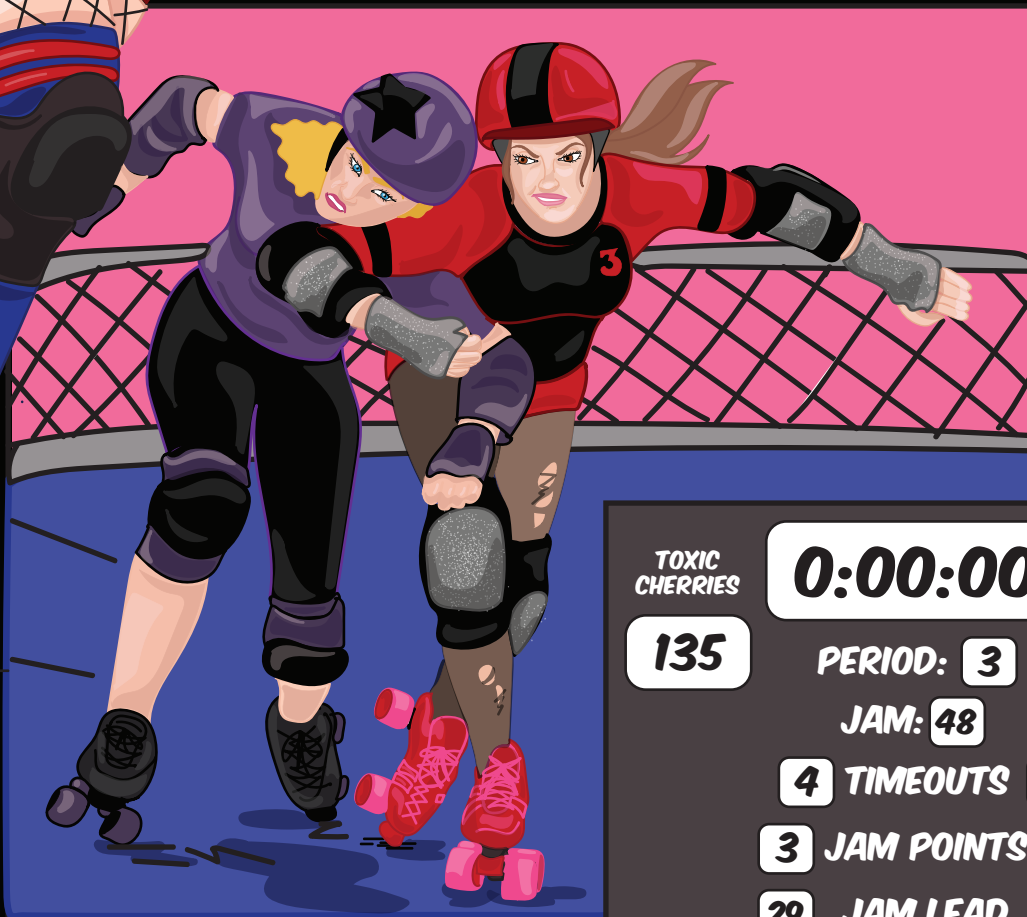




**TOXIC
CHERRIES**



TOXIC
CHERRIES

135

0:00:00

PERIOD: 3

JAM: 48

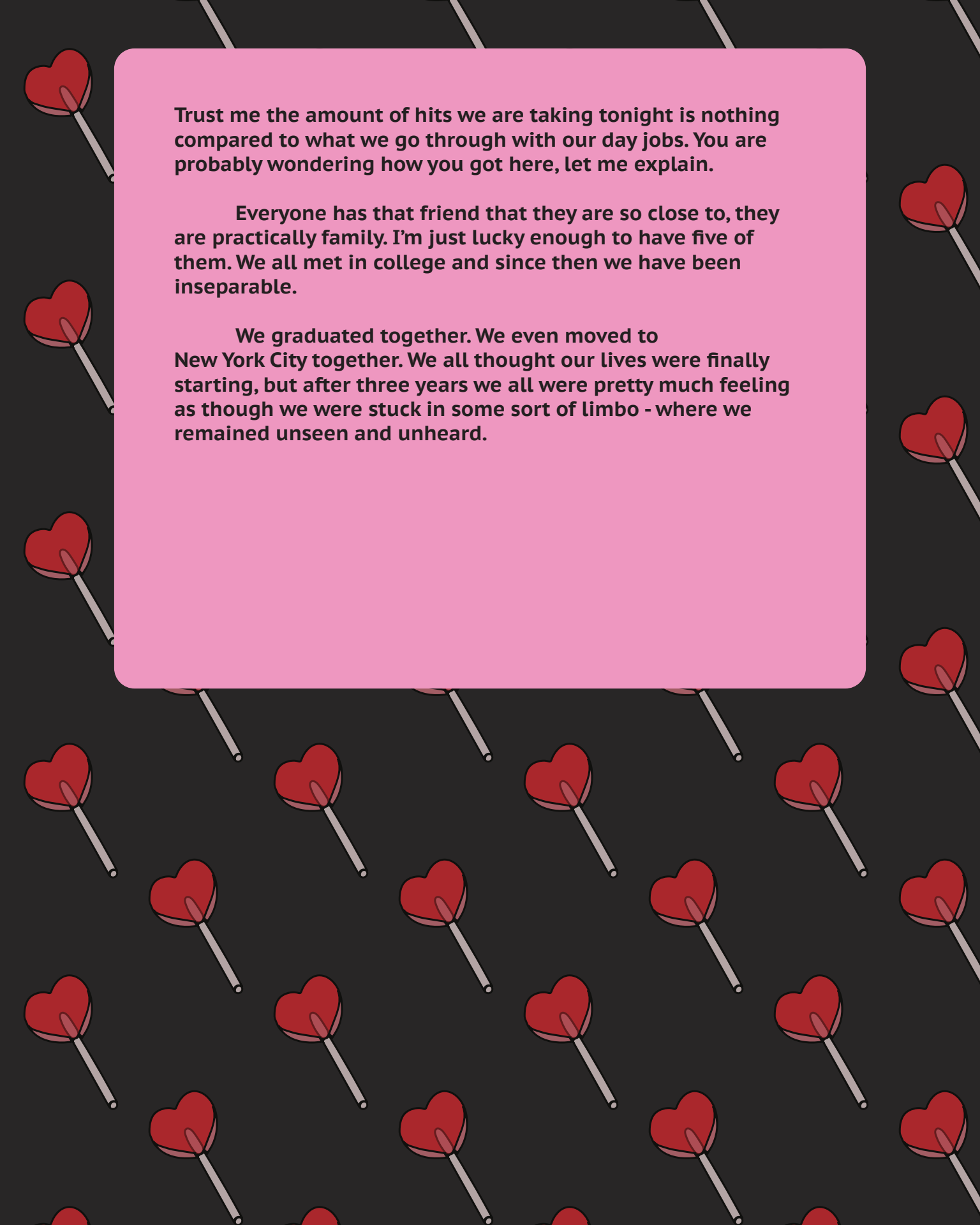
4 TIMEOUTS 2

3 JAM POINTS 2

29 JAM LEAD 22

BOSTON
BOMBSHELLS

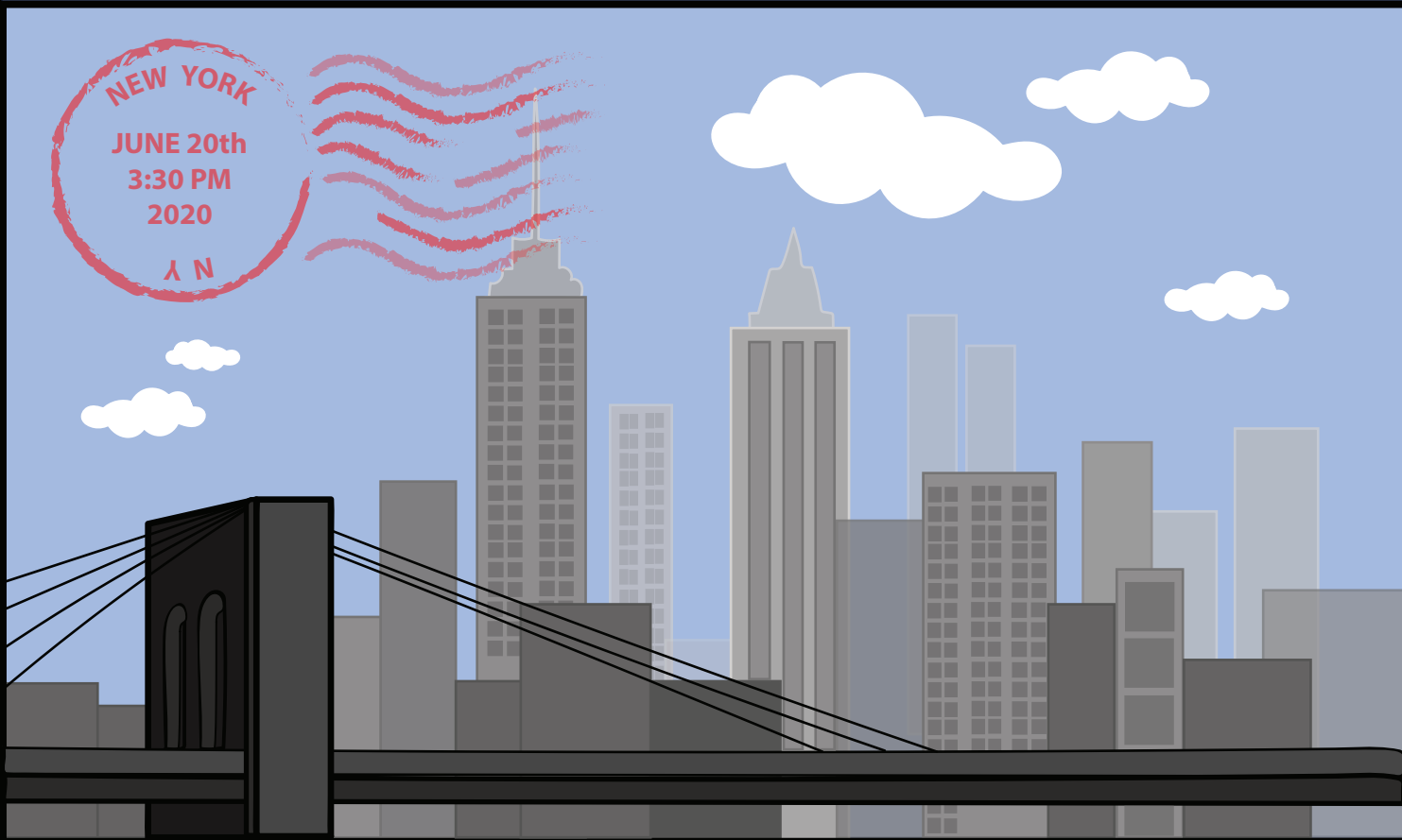
132



Trust me the amount of hits we are taking tonight is nothing compared to what we go through with our day jobs. You are probably wondering how you got here, let me explain.

Everyone has that friend that they are so close to, they are practically family. I'm just lucky enough to have five of them. We all met in college and since then we have been inseparable.

We graduated together. We even moved to New York City together. We all thought our lives were finally starting, but after three years we all were pretty much feeling as though we were stuck in some sort of limbo - where we remained unseen and unheard.




The background of the entire image is a dark grey or black field covered with a repeating pattern of stylized lightning bolts. Each bolt is white with a thick red outline and is oriented diagonally. Overlaid on this background is a large, solid pink rectangle with rounded corners. Inside this pink rectangle, there are three paragraphs of text in a black, sans-serif font. The first paragraph is at the top, followed by a larger second paragraph, and then a third paragraph at the bottom.

Each of us had our own dreams to pursue.

Aldean is a musical genius. We nicknamed her DeeDee after we discovered her obsession for the Ramones. She graduated with a double major in music theory and composition and can play 10 different instruments. She also has a killer singing voice to top it all off. She can't seem to get her foot in the door, however, because the music industry is so competitive. She hasn't been able to find anything outside of the club she works at, surviving on the tips she makes either as their DJ or house musician (depending on the night). The DJ gig hasn't been so great because she is usually only allowed to play the same top 40 hits over and over. She has felt like a human juke box most nights but every once in a while, when the assistant manager is working, he sometimes lets her play what she wants for an hour or two and she's even squeezed in a few original songs of her own in the mix. Unfortunately, that only happens once or twice a month.

Frances (aka Frankie) was supposed to become a world-famous chef. Three years ago, she was hired at a five-star restaurant as the sous-chef but she hasn't had the opportunity to show off her skills because the executive chef is a control freak and doesn't seem to have much faith in her. He has never given her a chance to prove herself to him.

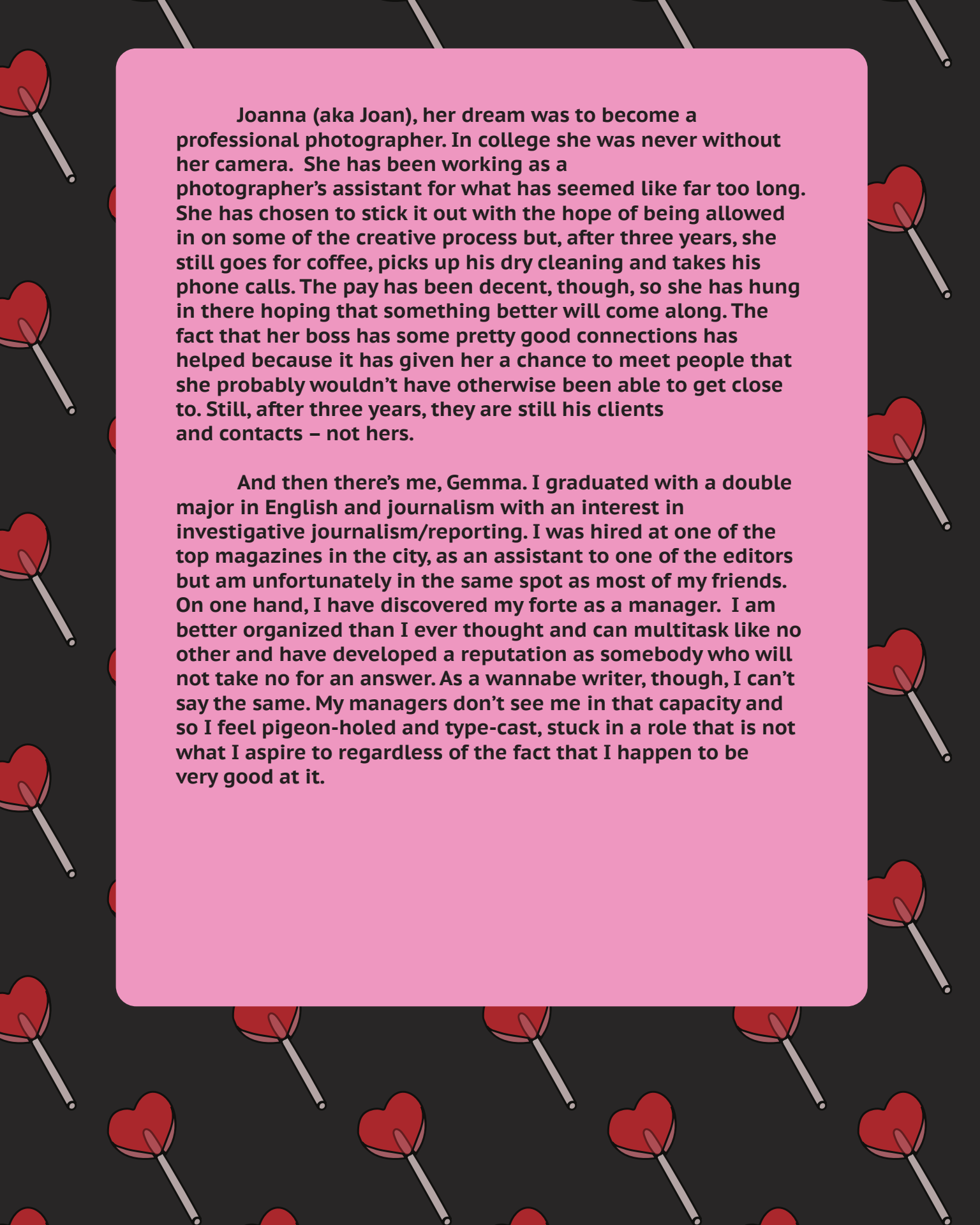




The only thing Ashlyn (aka Ash) ever wanted to be was a fashion designer. It is her true passion and she is crazy talented. She has felt stuck as an assistant to a fashion designer for way too long, but every time she has tried to discuss it with her boss she has been rejected or put on hold because there is always a deadline to meet or something more important to focus on. She has never gotten an opportunity to show off her true talents because her boss has had her running errands and acting more like his personal secretary. As is often the case with administrative assistants, she has been too easily taken for granted and under-appreciated.

Ronnie graduated with a major in art history and a minor in museum studies. Her dream has always been to own her own gallery or at least manage and curate at a well-known one. However, the reality sank in a long time ago that both of these dreams require capital and experience. Suffice it to say that she knew she would have to work her way up but so far she has had to settle for a job as a museum tour guide at a small gallery in Chelsea in order to pay her bills. It has been a long hard road for Joan. Every time there has been an opening or a chance to move up, something always seems to interfere.





Joanna (aka Joan), her dream was to become a professional photographer. In college she was never without her camera. She has been working as a photographer's assistant for what has seemed like far too long. She has chosen to stick it out with the hope of being allowed in on some of the creative process but, after three years, she still goes for coffee, picks up his dry cleaning and takes his phone calls. The pay has been decent, though, so she has hung in there hoping that something better will come along. The fact that her boss has some pretty good connections has helped because it has given her a chance to meet people that she probably wouldn't have otherwise been able to get close to. Still, after three years, they are still his clients and contacts – not hers.

And then there's me, Gemma. I graduated with a double major in English and journalism with an interest in investigative journalism/reporting. I was hired at one of the top magazines in the city, as an assistant to one of the editors but am unfortunately in the same spot as most of my friends. On one hand, I have discovered my forte as a manager. I am better organized than I ever thought and can multitask like no other and have developed a reputation as somebody who will not take no for an answer. As a wannabe writer, though, I can't say the same. My managers don't see me in that capacity and so I feel pigeon-holed and type-cast, stuck in a role that is not what I aspire to regardless of the fact that I happen to be very good at it.

After what had been a particularly long week, we girls decided to get together at Frankie's place where she would cook us some amazing food. As I headed down the stairs into the subway station, I glanced over at a poster that was plastered on the wall advertising an upcoming roller derby tournament. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. "Enter the Tournament of Champions!" I could hear the rumbling of the train as it approached the platform, so I took a picture of the poster with my cell phone. The wheels were turning.

I called up our friend, Jacks. He was the first person we met when we moved to New York and ever since then he has been our good luck charm. We call him Jacks because he is like the Jack of all trades. He is the ultimate hook up. Anything we need, we know to call Jacks. He can get us into any club, bar, private event, concert, restaurant in the city. He also happens to work at his uncle's roller rink on the weekends.

"Hey Gem! What's shakin bacon?" He answered.

"Shakin bacon?" I laughed.

"What? I'm tired of just saying hello, I'm trying something new out for a change. So what's shakin?"

"Do you still have access to your uncle's roller rink after hours?" I inquired.

"Yeah why?" Jacks could tell something was up.

"Can you meet me and the girls there in like 45 minutes?" I asked.

"Sure thing...but what's going on?"

"I'll explain everything when we get there, thanks Jacks!"

"No problemo!" He said and hung up.

I messaged the group and didn't get off at my normal stop.

Downtown
& Brooklyn

A

C



DREAM

2ND CHANCE



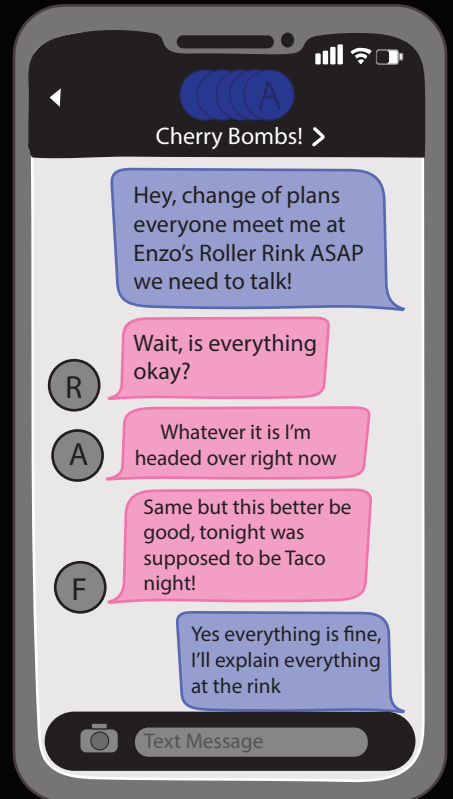
ENTER THE TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS!

May the best
team win!
Tournament:
May 17th, 2021
at The Bridge
Park Community
Leisure Centre
London, England

Winning team gets
\$25,000!



Only 4 teams
will qualify!



When I got there, Jacks was already there leaning up against the brick wall smoking a cigarette. He saw me approaching and peeled himself off of the wall.
“How many times do I have to tell you, smoking kills.”
I shouted on my way in for a hug as we did our on-going bit.

“Yes well at least I will look sexy as hell before I die.” He hugged me back and laughed at the joke.
“Thanks for meeting me here.” We stepped in and everything was the same as it always was just completely empty.
“No problem, what is this all about?” He wanted to know.
Just then the rest of the gang showed up with confused looks and questions.
“Listen, everyone.” I began. “We have all been stuck in the same place for way too long, and it is starting to bring us down. I mean...we’re not exactly living the life, right? What if I have a solution to all of that?”
“What solution?” Joan asked, still hesitant.
“This.” I said, holding up the poster so they could all read it. They still looked confused.
“What is a roller derby tournament going to fix for us?”
“We are going to start a roller derby team.”
“What?”
“You, me...all of us here...are going to form a roller derby team and we are going to be a part of that tournament. Just look! The prize is \$25,000 and the chance to play in the world cup!!”
“This is months from now?”
“Exactly,” I said. “which means, we can ...should... start training and practicing now.”

With a bit more arm twisting and begging I got the group to agree!

The first step was to qualify for the league. We had a practice facility in Jack's uncle's rink and Jacks was able to pull a few strings and call in some favors. Truth be told, the league had been struggling for a few years and needed support, so entry wasn't very difficult. Jack's uncle agreed to sponsor us and we were off and ... skating. The first line of business we needed to take of was deciding on each of our derby names: Frankie became Frances Mc-Derby, Joan became Joni Missal, Ash became Atomic Betty, Ronnie became Roxy Rampage, DeeDee became Debbie Demolition, and I became Glitter Bomb. It was an absolute no brainer that Ash would be in charge of the team uniforms, she went full fashion designer on us and made them herself.

Then the next step was to qualify for the league. We had a practice facility in Jack's uncle's rink and Jack's was able to pull a few strings and call in some favors. Truth be told, the league had been struggling for a few years and needed support, so entry wasn't very difficult. Jack's uncle agreed to sponsor us and we were off and skating like crazy.

The next few weeks we met every night after hours at the rink to learn the ins and outs of the game and we practiced our asses off. DeeDee took the opportunity and made a playlist for us during practice, it was to help get us out of our heads and into the mindset of the sport. There were even a few original songs made by her that she included. As we continued practicing more and more, Jacks observed and chose each of our positions. DeeDee and Joan would be our alternating Jammers because they were the fastest of the group, not to mention they both knew how to do different tricks. I was chosen for the Pivot position, which means for the most part I would help block but could also be put into the jammer position if need be. Along with the Pivot position I was made team captain since this whole thing was my idea in the first place. Then Ronnie, Frankie, and Ash were assigned as the main blockers that would alternate with me because they were the strongest and toughest of the group.



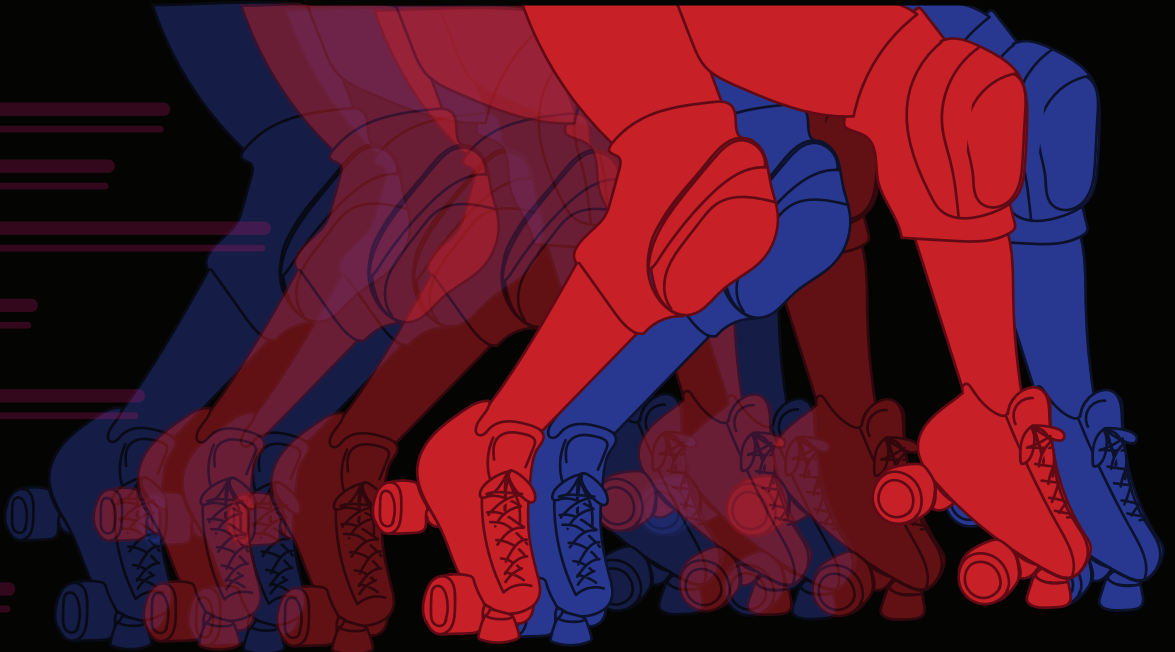
JAMMERS:
DEEDEE AND JOAN



PIVOT:
GEMMA



BLOCKERS:
ASHLYN, FRANKIE,
AND RONNIE



At the end of those three weeks of training Ash handed us our finished uniforms and Jacks hooked us up with our first match and damned if we didn't win it. Then we continued to take on all comers for the rest of our season and were surprised at how much we improved with every contest. It was baptism by fire and we were all learning as fast as we could. Then came the last match of the season to see whether or not we would qualify for the tournament. Jacks called us over before we took to the track.

"Listen to me, if we win or lose this it doesn't matter because this was about taking back that control that you lost for a bit. This was about bringing fun back into your lives, did you do that?"

"Yes!" We all answered as a group.

"I am so proud to be your coach, it has been a wild ride so no matter what happens out there I will always be here for you guys and there is always next year. Now go out there, kick some ass, and have fun. Come what may." Jacks suddenly broke into song. "Come what maaay...."

"Wait. Are you singing a number from Moulin Rouge?" DeeDee and the rest of the group laughed.

"Yes, it is a wonderful film that has so many important life lessons..." Jack turned red with embarrassment. "Whatever. You know I love that movie."

They all lost it at that point and Jacks yelled, "JUST GET OUT THERE AND DO WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TRAINING TO DO!!! LEAVE EVERYTHING ON THAT TRACK TODAY!!! GO!! GO!! GO!!"

As we skated out and lined up on the track with the opposing team...Jacks had kept us laughing throughout the season, but in his own inimitable way, he had inspired us. What had started as a crazy idea to add some fun back into our mundane lives had grown into something of a genuine calling. It was about something more than the fun or the \$25,000 prize. It was about having taken control of our destinies. As we got into position and waited for the starting gun, I think we were all closer than we had ever been...the team that we were always meant to be.

THE TOXIC CHERRIES

DEBBY
DEMOLITION

JONI
MISSAL

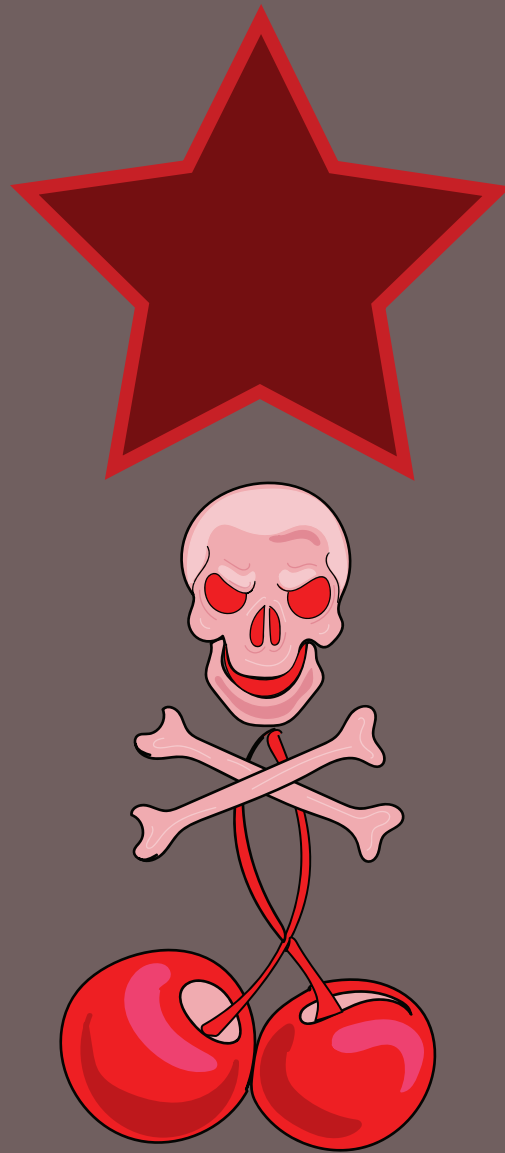
ATOMIC
BETTY

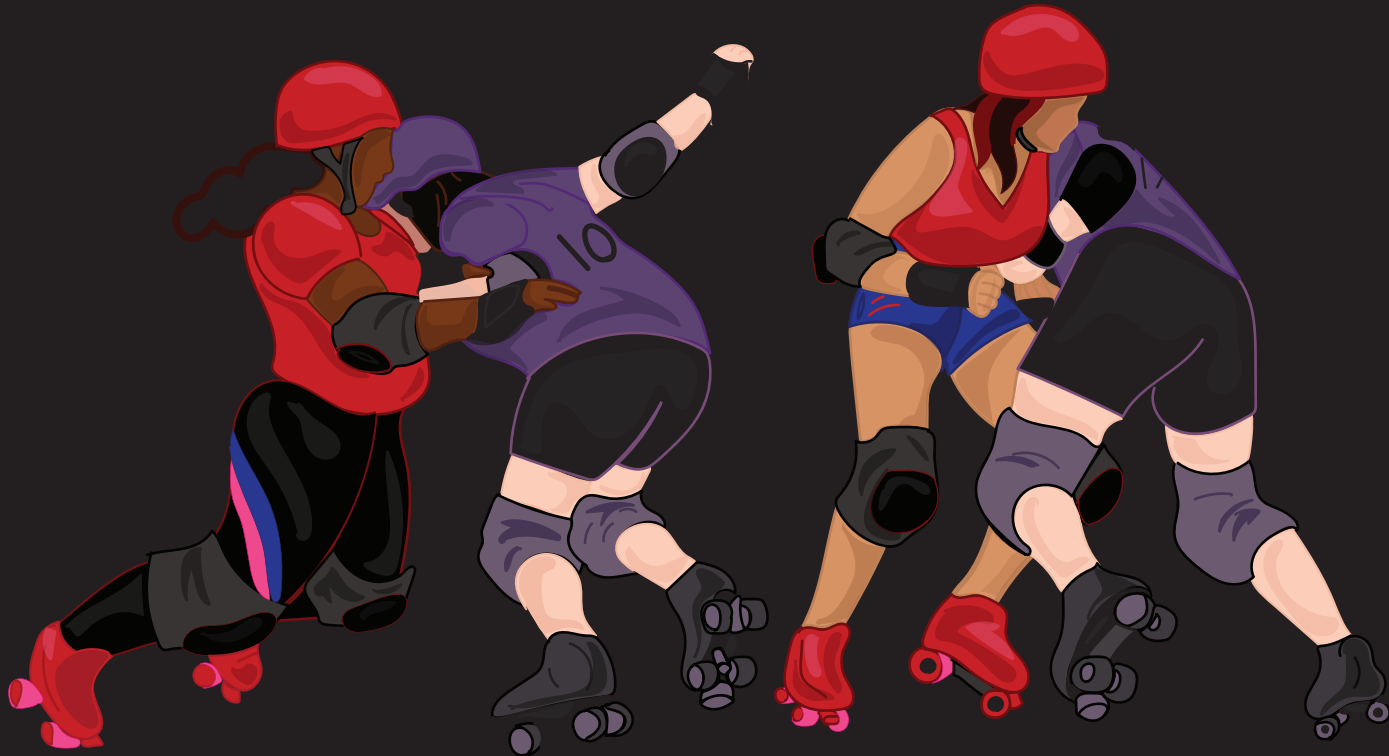
#1
COACH!

FRANCES
MCDERBY

GLITTER
BOMB

ROXY
RAMPAGE





TOXIC
CHERRIES

135

0:00:00

PERIOD: 3

JAM: 48

4 TIMEOUTS 2

3 JAM POINTS 2


29 JAM LEAD 22

BOSTON
BOMBHELLS

132



VICTORY!!!!



All of our matches that season had been challenging but this final contest was brutal. Our competition was tough and, while I cannot say that they cheated...per se...they were not above the occasional dirty shot (when the referee wasn't looking, of course). Their jammer was fast and agile and their blockers were three of the biggest girls we had ever skated against. At one point, we were down but not out, and DeeDee (our jammer) had a bloody nose that Jacks kept stuffing gauze into in a desperate effort to stop the bleeding. "That big bull with the spiked hair elbowed me good." She spat. I had seen DeeDee get mad before but never like this. "Frankie," She said. "Didn't you say that you studied Judo?" Frankie nodded, "Yeah...but that was a hundred years ago...I don't –" DeeDee interrupted, "Use that bitch's size against her. Take her out." The next time around the track, Frankie sent that girl over the rail. It was the shot in the arm that we all needed and the momentum never broke as we continued to rack up the points. As for that big bull...she never quite overcame the shock or the awe of what Frankie had done to her. It really took her down a few notches and – with some blood (mostly Dee Dee's), a lot of sweat, and tears of joy – we won in the clutch!

The announcer yelled out our victory!

"WELL FOLKS LOOKS LIKE THE TOXIC CHERRIES ARE OUR WINNERS! CONGRADULATIONS ON YOUR 25K WIN TONIGHT LADIES!"

Jacks joined our victory huddle and smiled.

"Well ladies you know what this means!!!"

We all looked at each other with confident smiles because we knew exactly what was in store for us.



**TO BE
CONTINUED...**