



Rock and a Hard Place  
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Here I am, “Rock and a Hard Place.” Actually that’s my Roller Derby name, the name my fans are chanting. Right now I’m the jammer, or in laymen’s terms, the point scorer.

Today Busch Stadium is crowded and everyone is shouting my name as I stand here at the starting line. Kids are screaming from the bleachers, “Rock and a Hard Place, we love you!” I usually try to ham it up for the kids especially being a sports figure as I know they look up to us Roller Girls. Lately my little fans have been sporting red t-shirts; my signature color I wear during tournaments. However, I think it will be a while before my black and white striped socks catch on as a fashion statement.

The Women’s Flat Track Roller Derby Association approved our bid this year to finally play host and we pulled out all the stops by renting the stadium! I’m extra nervous today because it’s the play offs, and of course no pressure added but almost everyone in St. Louis is watching this match. They want to know how their Arch Rival Roller Girls match up to Kansas City, Detroit and Philly.

Luckily, I have my secret weapon, my best friend Blue. Actually he’s not my secret weapon, but he has supplied me with discreet green energy propulsion units which he attached to the bottom of my skates. I know what you’re thinking, ‘if you’re good enough to make the team then you should be fast enough to not need rockets on your skates’. You are correct, but just think of it as insurance, or preventative medicine from getting my bones pulverized by the blockers on the other teams. The faster I am, the more the blockers hate it, but the sweeter it is to hear my name being echoed in the stadium by the crowd. Let’s be honest, I’m in it for the fame and nobody wants to see their heroine with bruises on her face.

The whistle blew, I clicked my wheels together as Blue instructed to start the propulsion units and I lost control! Instead of going forward like he promised, I went backwards, pushing into other teammates and blockers causing a domino effect. Just as I was about to get someone’s left skate in my face, I was no longer in Busch stadium and surrounded by a blinding whirring light. Then, suddenly I dropped into powdery brown dirt. When I stood up and observed my surroundings, I realized I was in an eerily empty baseball field at second base. There were no fans, no kids screaming for autographs, just lonely silence.

As I gathered my bearings looking for clues as to where I was, all I could see were multi tiered wooden bleachers and the baseball diamond I had landed in. Deciding to venture out to gather more information, I took off my skates, tied the shoelaces together and slung them over my shoulder. Making my way through the short patchy grass I could see a poorly constructed chain link fence just past the bleachers.

Lucky for me, I had another weapon Blue supplied me with, a modified Swiss Army knife. Arriving at the fence I managed to wrangle the knife from my sports bra and switched the knife blade to a pair of wire cutters. I snipped through the fence and squeezed my way through to the street. I spotted a diner on the other side. Maybe one of the people in there could help me? I made a beeline for it.

Swinging the door open all eyes fell on me, I just wished they were the eyes of my fans. Looking down at my clothes I realized why the customers were staring. I came barreling in wearing short shorts, fishnet stockings, shin guards, wrist guards, knee and elbow pads and a strange helmet featuring a skull and bones sticker on one side, oh yeah and the cherry on the top, my funny striped socks. Looking back up at everyone else, they seemed more put together than I was.

The waitress helping a family sported a beautiful brunette page boy hairdo, bright full red lips and eyelashes that could knock anyone out who decided to have a closer look. The kids seemed to be in dress clothes like they had just been to a play. The little boy was even wearing a baby blue bow tie—what kind of kid wears a bow tie while eating a sloppy joe? I glanced at the people in the booth closest to the door. There was an older gentleman smoking a pipe in a business suit, holding a newspaper. On the front it read, “Churchill to make speech at Westminster College in Fulton Missouri”. Just under the headline was today’s date March 2nd...1946.

I went into shock and had to sit at the counter in order to gather myself and my thoughts. It felt weird sitting there with everyone staring, slurping their soup and coffee. There was nowhere else for me to go. Then peeking over at the well dressed children under my helmet an idea popped in my head. If my guess was right, and they had been with their family to see a play, I couldn’t be far from the Fox Theater! Grandma had told me Gramps had worked at the Fox as one of their technicians. This seemed like my only hope. I spun around on the stool facing the door of the diner, strapped my skates back on and skated as fast as I could bursting through the door, heading toward the theater.

I finally made it to the Fox. A group of people were rehearsing lines for a play on the stage inside. Trying to seem like I belonged in 1946, and anxious to find my Grandfather, after their first scene, I called from the seats, “What are you rehearsing?” A woman with a messy white haired bun and a don’t-mess-with-me look on her face replied, “Scenes from ‘Born Yesterday’.”

How appropriate I thought.

“Can I help you?” asked the woman in a no nonsense tone.

“Can you point me in the direction of Mr. Meyers?”

“Oh! You’re one of Johnny’s girls eh?” She looked at me up and down. “That explains a lot.”

She gave the other actors a funny look, a look that unsettled me. Johnny was my Great-Uncle's name, not my Grandpa's name. I had forgotten that he too had worked at the fabulous Fox.

"He's the man behind the curtains. I'm sure he can show you the ropes around here, if you know what I mean."

My stomach turned. I hopped up onto the stage, pulled back the curtain and caught a glimpse of the man I hadn't seen in 19 years since he passed away. He was hunched over in overalls looking at a fuse. He was always looking at things trying to figure out how they worked. Like me, he was into science, but didn't always necessarily understand it. We were people of action, rather than reflection and calculation. He always told me as a kid, "Anything technological I learned from your Grandpa, everything else I did without him was just a lucky guess." My eyes started to tear, even though he's my favorite Uncle, he was not the man I needed to see right now, at least without my Grandpa's help or supervision.

"Hiya Doll!" he said in his unmistakable loud and jolly voice. He used to greet me this way with open arms. However when he said it this time, he gave me the impression he wasn't thinking of me as his adorable kid niece.

"Do you know where Bill Meyers is?"

"Oh you're looking for my big brother! Well honey, I'm sure you're a swell gal, but you're too late, he's getting married later tonight."

Immediately my tears dried up as I gave him a confused stare. "I'm not here to look for a date. I just needed to ask him something."

"Well maybe I can take a shot at answering your question. What is it you need?" he asked. "By the way, those are some fancy skates you got there! They must have cost you a small fortune. How did an unusual lookin' lady like you get a hold of those?"

"The skates were a gift from my Grandpa." I wanted to tell Johnny who I was and that his brother had given them to me because I was a lot like him. I wanted to tell him how much he was missed, however he would never be able to understand why. He didn't know who I was, and he shouldn't know.

"Your Grandpa sounds like a nice man to give you a gift like that. Do you mind if I have a look at them?" asked Uncle Johnny.

"Sure, take a look," I said lifting my leg so he could see the propulsion units.

"Actually, these are what I came here to ask the other Mr. Meyers about."

"WOW! What kind of crazy contraption is that?"

"If I told you", I said in my best stern voice, "it could alter time and space."

"A fierce talking gal like yourself will never get help with that tone of voice."

"Touché," I said. We smiled.

"Johnny, do you promise to keep a secret? You can't say anything to anyone ever because it will alter the course of the future if you do!"

"Of course doll, whatever it is, it can't be THAT serious, Billy and I have been through the war, it can't get any more serious than that!"

I'd forgotten that minor detail. Despite my Grandpa and Uncle's silliness and eccentricities, they were also great men who had been through a lot. My situation couldn't possibly compare to what they had been through. When I was always in the hospital as a kid, Uncle Johnny would visit me. He used to say, "This too shall pass." Because he was a

man of unwavering strength and believed in me as a kid, I took a chance on what I was about to tell him.

“I’m from the future.”

About 10 minutes later after his laughter disrupted the play rehearsal on the other side of the curtain he said, “That explains the get up! Proceed...”

After hearing me retell the accounts of my day without revealing my identity, Johnny quit giggling. Reality set in; I was telling him the truth.

“So you need my help to get you back?” he said.

I nodded my head yes.

“Unfortunately I didn’t bring my tool box with me today-I was just supposed to be operating the sound and lights!”

That’s when I remembered I had Blue’s gift, the modified Swiss Army Knife. “Here!” I said throwing it to Johnny.

“You said the contraption propelled you backwards, right?” Again I nodded yes. “Well what if you flipped it around the other way so it will propel you forward instead of backwards? Maybe this could get you into the future?”

Johnny loosened the four screws on each skate and reversed the rockets. I kindly thanked Johnny, shook his hand which resulted in him pulling me into his bear hug, the hug that I missed so much after he passed away when I was 11. I sobbed into his worn blue overalls.

“Hey,” he said softly, “everything is going to be alright, you’ll get back. You can do it! I just wish I didn’t have to work so I could go to Sportsman’s park to watch you take off from 2nd base. It’s funny that that’s where you landed. Red Schoendienst is one of my favorite players. They might even win the series this year!”

I gave Johnny one last look with tears running down my face. I wanted to stay and talk baseball with him like we often did when I was younger. The only thing I could manage to say was, “You’re probably right,” as I turned around to head toward the curtain.

“Rock and a Hard Place? What does that mean?”

He had read the back of my jersey.

“Ask Gran...I mean Bill, after he and Jean have been married for 40 years.” Grandpa always said having a conversation with my Grandmother and I always made him feel as if he was going to get himself stuck between a rock (my Grandmother) and a hard place (me).

“It’s better if he tells you,” I said. “Oh and by the way, thank you and please tell them your new friend says congratulations!”

I quickly skated toward the ball field I now knew was Sportsman’s park. The evening was approaching and daylight was fading making it harder to see.

Arriving at the fence I untied my skates, and slung them over my shoulder. Squeezing through the hole I had cut earlier, I made my way through the bleachers and back down to the patchy ball field.

Sitting there on second base as I put the skates back on, I took in one last look of 1946. I got into starting line position like I had upon arrival, and clicked the wheels of the skates together. Suddenly the whirring blinding light was back. Hopefully signaling my arrival in the future, my present.

I landed right in front of the pack comprised of my teammates and our opposition, all ready to knock me off course. I could hardly blame them for wanting to do so after the catastrophe my skates had caused earlier. The entire round I relied on my own strength and speed and earned 21 points for the jam! I didn't need stupid skate rockets, just the belief that I could do it on my own.

At the end of the match the crowd rushed the players on the flat track. Grandpa hobbled his way onto the field and gave me a big hug.

"I'm so proud of you!" Grandpa exclaimed.

He handed me a small gift with a red bow on it. Again tears welled in my eyes and I started trembling, it had been an emotional day. Grandpa was so excited for me to see his gift he lunged for it in my hand trying to pull off the lid. Yanking it away I said, "I can do it! I can do it!"

After a couple of tries I couldn't get the box open. As usual Grandpa had used too much tape trying to secure the object inside. I reached for my Swiss Army knife in my brazier, and it wasn't there. I must have looked like I had ants in my shirt from the way I was grasping around. Alarm set in, I had left the knife with Johnny.

"Oh, here! Let me do it for you! You're always so silly, when will you realize you don't have to be silly just to get attention?"

Grandpa ripped the tape off with his strong hands and handed me the contents. It was the modified Swiss Army knife Blue had made for me...aged 64 years. I was so shocked and confused.

"How did you...?" I said looking at Grandpa bewildered. He just thought I was taken aback by his thoughtful gift.

"This was a personal present given to me by my brother, your Uncle Johnny, on the day your Grandmother and I got married." He looked down as he turned the knife over in my hand. "You are so much like Johnny. There is no doubt he would have wanted you to have this."

I smiled looking down at the Swiss Army Knife with tears running down my face.

"You know what he told me about that knife and why its so special?"

I let out a small giggle and couldn't quit smiling with the expectation of what Grandpa would say next.

"He said that Swiss Army there in your hand helped him with a rock and a hard place. Later on I thought that story was funny because that's what I used to call you and your Grandma! Now I figured it would be a perfect gift for you!"

Grandpa couldn't have been more right.