The violent sound of hockey pucks careening off safety glass echoes through the frozen arena. Women shout back and forth as the puck sails from one end of the rink to the other. The once-smooth ice is being chewed up by the powerful skaters, their ponytails bouncing behind them as they fly across the glassy surface. My eyes focus on a crouched figure positioned in front of the net who calmly scans the frozen surface for any hint of oncoming danger. Fog rises out of the cage of her blue-and-white helmet. Suddenly a puck screams through the air straight at her. The goalie lashes out her stick and directs the shot away from her sacred net. The puck slides to a stop at the foot of the wall that protects me from the mayhem on the other side. I imagine one of those pucks embedding itself into my sternum. Awesome.
I know next to nothing about hockey. I don't know the rules, the positions, the team names or where they are from. So, when my editor gave me the assignment to be a goalie for the ISU Women's Hockey Club for one practice, I cheered and did a cartwheel. Why? Because I'm a masochist. And an idiot.

I step watching practice and head to the bathroom with four of my friends to suit up in my borrowed goalie gear. All 59 pounds of it. Once in my makeshift locker room, I nervously unzip the equipment bag. Then it hits me: an odor like a mixture of sweat, feet, and death. Why couldn't my assignment have been to play a spirited game of red rover instead?

First thing's first: I put on my cup. Then I pull a pair of skates with small, kidney-shaped pads around the edges. Next, I put on the massive shin guards and chest protector. Large, bulky elbow pads dash any hope of being able to move my arms. My strategy has changed from smacking, diving, savas and vomiting bystanders to standing in one place and hoping I still have both my arms when I'm finished with practice.

I finally lace up my skates and grab my stick. It has taken four minutes to get me ready to be a goalie. Not just any goalie, but the best goalie in the world. All this equipment makes me look like a huge badass, and the pads are so stiff I can't full down even if I want to.

I waddle out of the bathroom and into the arena to get a better look at my competition. The women fly effortlessly across the ice. I can barely walk. A word of encouragement would be nice at this point. The women's hockey coach, Blake Marshall, approaches me. “This should be interesting,” he says as he looks me up and down.

Finally, practice is over and it's my turn on the ice. I clumsily walk my way over to the waiting players, their shoulders heaving as they catch their breath. Their fatigue will be my salvation. I tell them not to take it easy on me. Then I take Coach Marshall's hand and step onto the ice.

I surprise myself by not falling right away. The ice, though chewed up and full of marks, is alarmingly slick. The coach leads me to the goal, my skates gliding on the ice as I walk with him. One of the players yells, “Skates are for skating, not walking!” Great. Now I feel like a dumbass. Off to a good start.

I finally get to the goal, plant my self in the blue half circle of the crease, turn around, clench my stick, and prepare for the impending onslaught. The team stands in front of me, famed out in a half circle. Taking a deep breath, I brace myself for the first shot. Holy shit.

It comes from the far right. I can hear the hiss of the puck as it leaves the stick. For a split second, I see it coming at me—and then suddenly it's gone. The puck hits my stick and caroms away. Hall yess. Brett 1, Women's Team 0.

The next shot is from my right again. And again, I can't see it. But if feel it when the puck hits my chest and bounces away. Brett 2, Women's Team 0.

I'm incredible at this! I stop the next four in a row and imagine myself being carried off the ice on the women's shoulders. I'm sure to lose it. The pucks come faster. Most of them land in the net behind me. The few pucks I manage to stop hit my body with a dull thud. It doesn't hurt as much as I thought it would, but sometimes a puck sneaks under the leg pads, bringing pain and, no doubt, bruises.

The ladies stop shooting, and look at Coach Marshall. Finally, some mercy. I'm just about to thank him for allowing me to do this, when he turns to his players and tells them to line up for breakaway drills. Apparently, I'm not done.

Breakaway drills are evil. A player starts at one end of the ice, picking up as much speed as she can, and then fires a shot at me. What is the hell kind of drill is this? I have a hard enough time stopping the puck when she players are stationary.

On the breakaways, I can barely get my stick up in time to protect myself, let alone make saves. Most of the women score easily because I can barely see what I'm trying to stop. Even the

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goalie lines up to take a shot at me. I grit my teeth, telling myself I’ve had enough of this humiliation, and try my hardest to make this save. She comes at me, her hair whipping behind her, speeding down the ice. She stops and rifles a shot.

In slow motion, I see the puck come at me. I close my eyes, throw out my glove, and let out a mighty bellow. Ahhhhh!

The puck slams into my palm, and I squeeze it tight. The greatest glove save of all time. A shock to everyone watching. I triumphantly thrust my arms into the air. People were hugging, laughing, crying. There wasn’t a dry eye in the place. It was the greatest moment of my life, as well as the greatest moment in the lives of anyone watching.

I gently put my prize puck down and push it away. With renewed confidence, I look up, ready to take on the next poor soul trying to score on Brett “The Wall” Plotz. The next shot ricochets right off my helmet and flies across the arena. OK, so it hurt, but I deserved it. I was getting a bit cocky.

Finally, the last shot goes into the net and I collapse, utterly exhausted. I was a goalie for only 15 minutes, but I was beat. I know now why those pads smell the way they do. I’m drenched in sweat. The coaches come over and congratulate me for doing so well. They even let me keep my glove-save puck. I pick myself up and shakily make my way off the ice. As I peel off my pads, I know I’ll be sore in the morning. No matter. I had survived as a hockey goalie. And, along with some curiously shaped bruises on my leg, I had a puck to prove it.