



**Ready...
Set...
Go Asma!**

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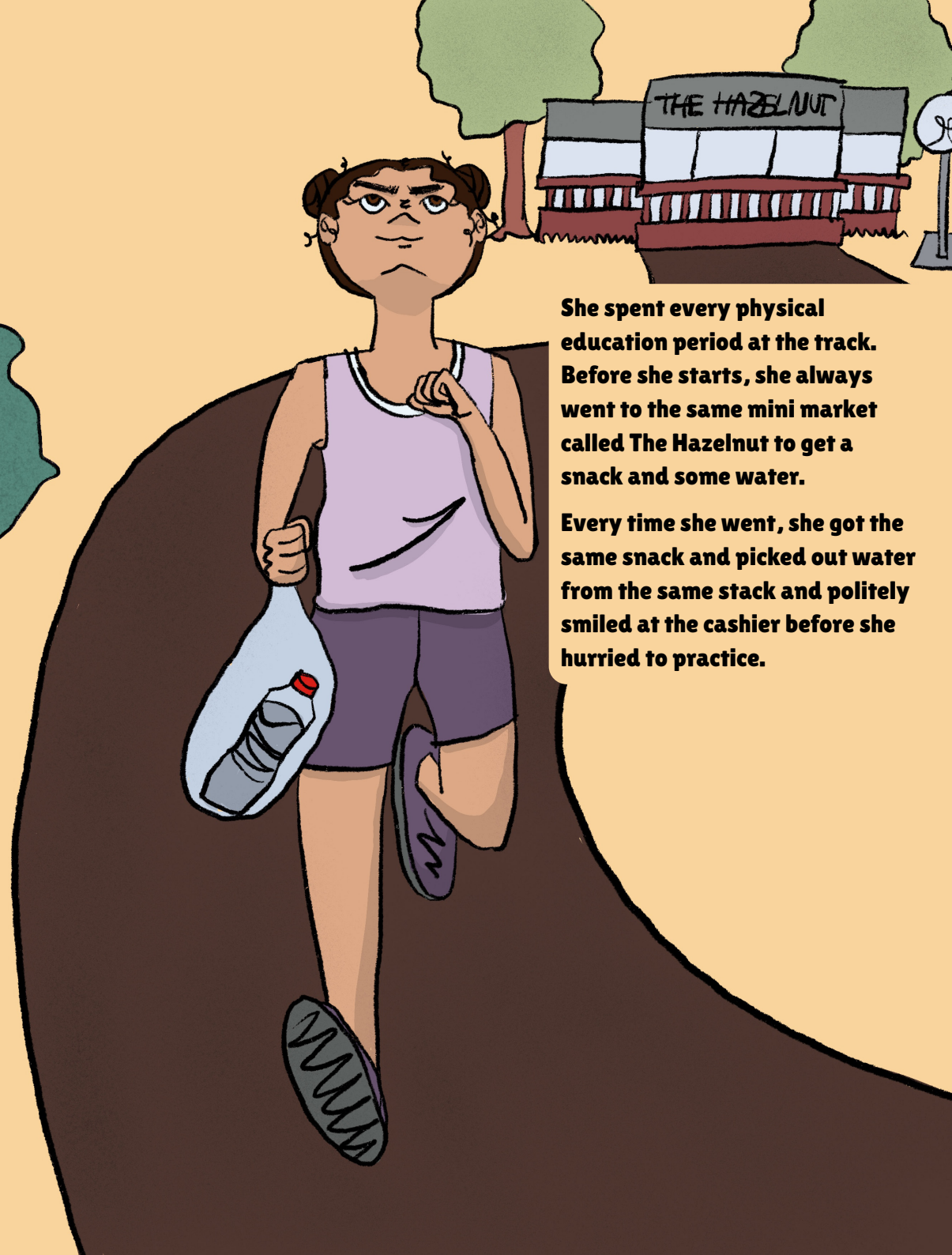
This is Asma, she is ten years old.



Asma lives in a small house in Beirut, Lebanon.

Beirut

She is a good student, and the most enjoyable part of school is the time she spends it running at track practice.



She spent every physical education period at the track. Before she starts, she always went to the same mini market called The Hazelnut to get a snack and some water.

Every time she went, she got the same snack and picked out water from the same stack and politely smiled at the cashier before she hurried to practice.

**One Monday afternoon,
Asma's coach Alice asked
"Asma! Are you ready?"**

**"Ready for what?"
answered Asma.**



Asma tried hard to conceal her immediate fear,

**"Of course I am ready, I was born ready coach," She hoped
she sounded as convincing as she thought she was.**

**Her heart was beating fast, palms were sweating, and she
was feeling nauseous. Asma knew that meant she was
anxious for her race. This happened every time she had a
race even though she knew that she was prepared and had
been training for it.**



She repeated to herself



and tried to focus on her practice that day.

She repeated to herself "I can do this, I can do this," and tried to focus on her practice that day.


As Asma was walking back to class she passed a couple of her boy classmates,

"You are a girl, why are you playing sports like a BOY?"

She walked past them confused.

"Girls can play sports, and I am good at it so why not?" Asma told them and kept walking not waiting for a reply.





Her friends saw her coming into class tired and red from practice and her girl friends immediately said

"Asma! You are so sweaty, good girls should not get dirty, only boys smell and sweat like that."

Asma frowned and looked down embarrassed, these are her friends saying that to her.

She felt sad.

Not only was she nervous about the race, but her friends were not being supportive of what she liked at all!

"Am I not a proper girl? Am I broken?" Asma thought to herself.

Asma's parents have always been supportive, and allowed her to do whatever she was comfortable doing, never limiting her passions.

"I know I am a girl, and I am good at running, so I should focus on my race and doing what I love because that is what matters to me!" Asma repeated this sentence over and over until she really believed it.

Asma's mom taught her these affirmations ever since she was a kid, and they always repeated them aloud in the mirror as they got ready.



Asma continued to go to practice, and coach Alice pushed her to her full potential every time.

Coach Alice was Asma's role model and she loved her so much she dreamt of becoming just as amazing as she was one day.



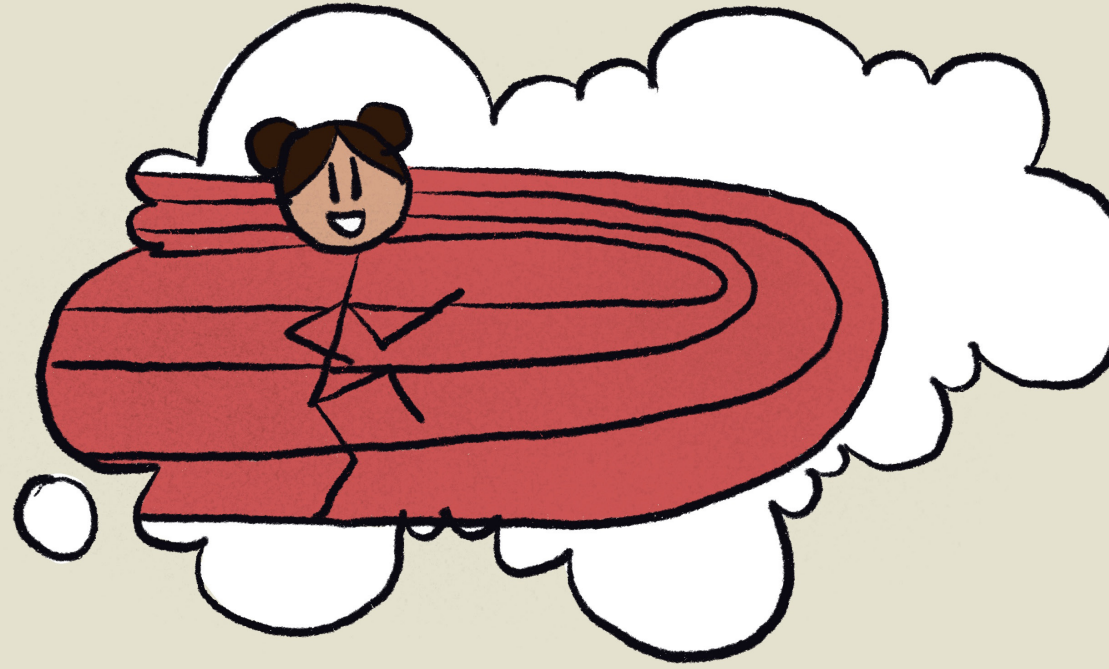
She made her way to The Hazelnut to get her snack and water, giving the nice old man behind the counter a polite smile and respectful nod, continuing her walk to practice.

Race day was approaching very fast, and Asma's thoughts were becoming too strong and overwhelming.





"Am I good enough? Maybe my friends are right, girls should not be doing sports, I do not know if I can do this." Asma thought to herself.



"But no, I am good and I can do this; I have done this before.

I CAN DO THIS."

She said it loudly in her head.

All these thoughts ran around in her head, her heart raced once again, her legs felt weak, she wanted to quit or skip the race.

Despite all this, she knew she loved the sport, and she knew she will be down at the start line tomorrow.



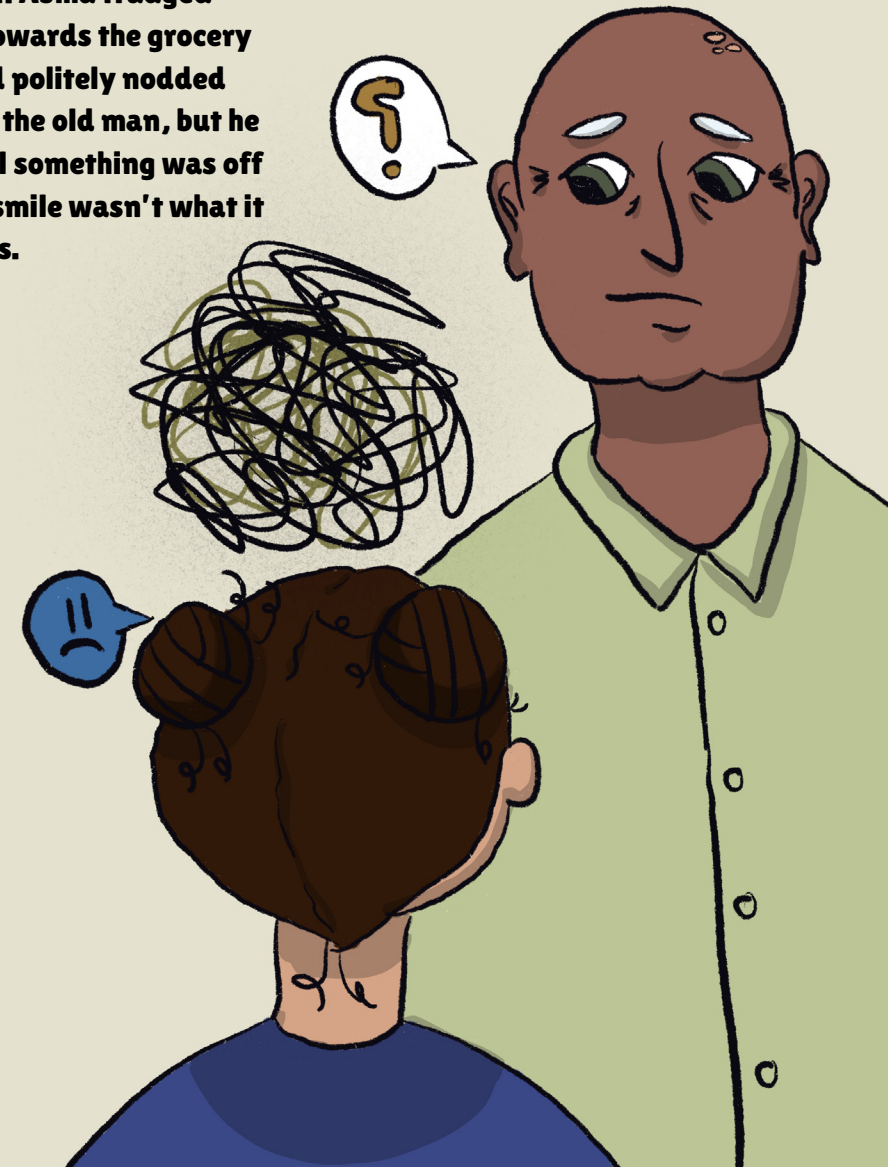
SATURDAY 18.2022 RACE DAY

As soon as Asma woke up she was already tired, everything made her short of breath and nauseous.

Asma started getting ready, preparing herself mentally and putting on her school jersey; she repeated to herself "I am strong, I am talented, I am fast, and I can do this."

Asma arrived at her school, and waited for the bus that was taking the team to the Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium.

She was compelled to go through her usual routine and made her way to The Hazelnut. Asma trudged slowly towards the grocery shop and politely nodded towards the old man, but he could tell something was off Asma's smile wasn't what it usually is.





"What is wrong little girl?" this was the first time she has heard the old man's voice.

"Oh! What is it?" the old man replied.

"Well, little girl you don't look too excited, is there anything else?" the old man questioned raising an eyebrow in suspicion.

"Little girl, it is okay to be scared you are brave for showing up at all. I know you can do this, I believe in you, just enjoy it as much as you can little cheetah." The old man said smiling widely.

She was not expecting him to break the routine, and her shyness took a hold of her.

Putting on a brave face Asma answers, "I've got a big day today."

"I have my 100m race today, I'm very excited!" Asma's voice squeaked towards the end.

Asma replies ashamed, "Well I am a bit nervous."

Asma smiled and felt a warm feeling spread through her stomach and suddenly her fingers stopped fidgeting which she didn't even notice was happening in the first place.





HUP! HUP! HUP!

Asma did this for the whole bus ride, and once she got to the stadium, she focused on one thing: warming up properly.

Going through her routine steps gave her a sense of control and security over the situation.

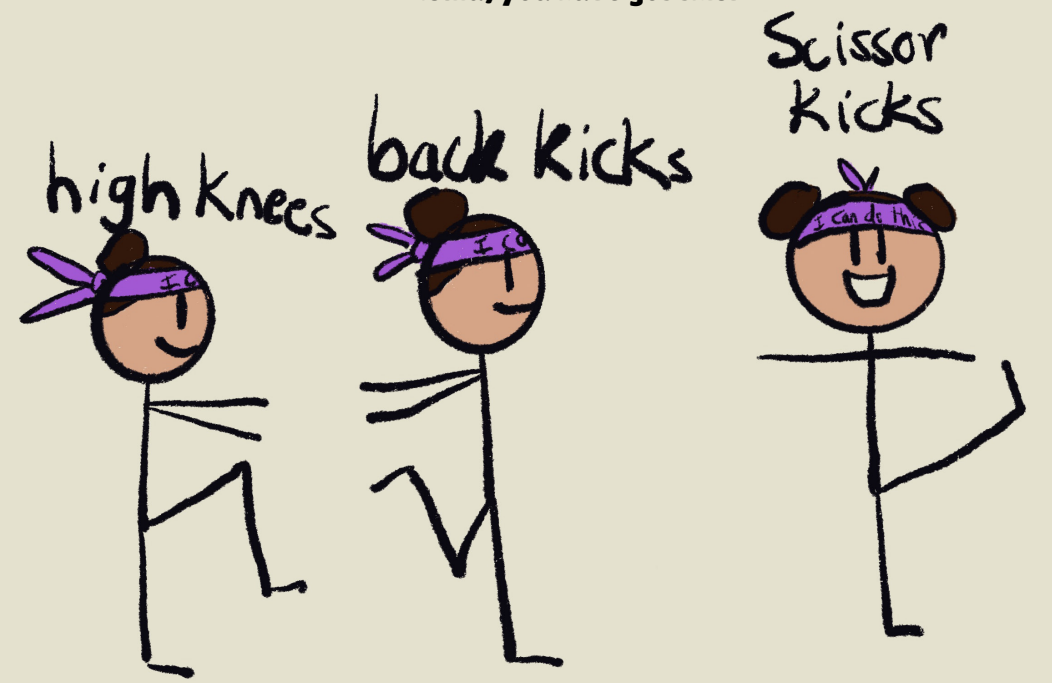
High knees, back kicks, scissor kicks...

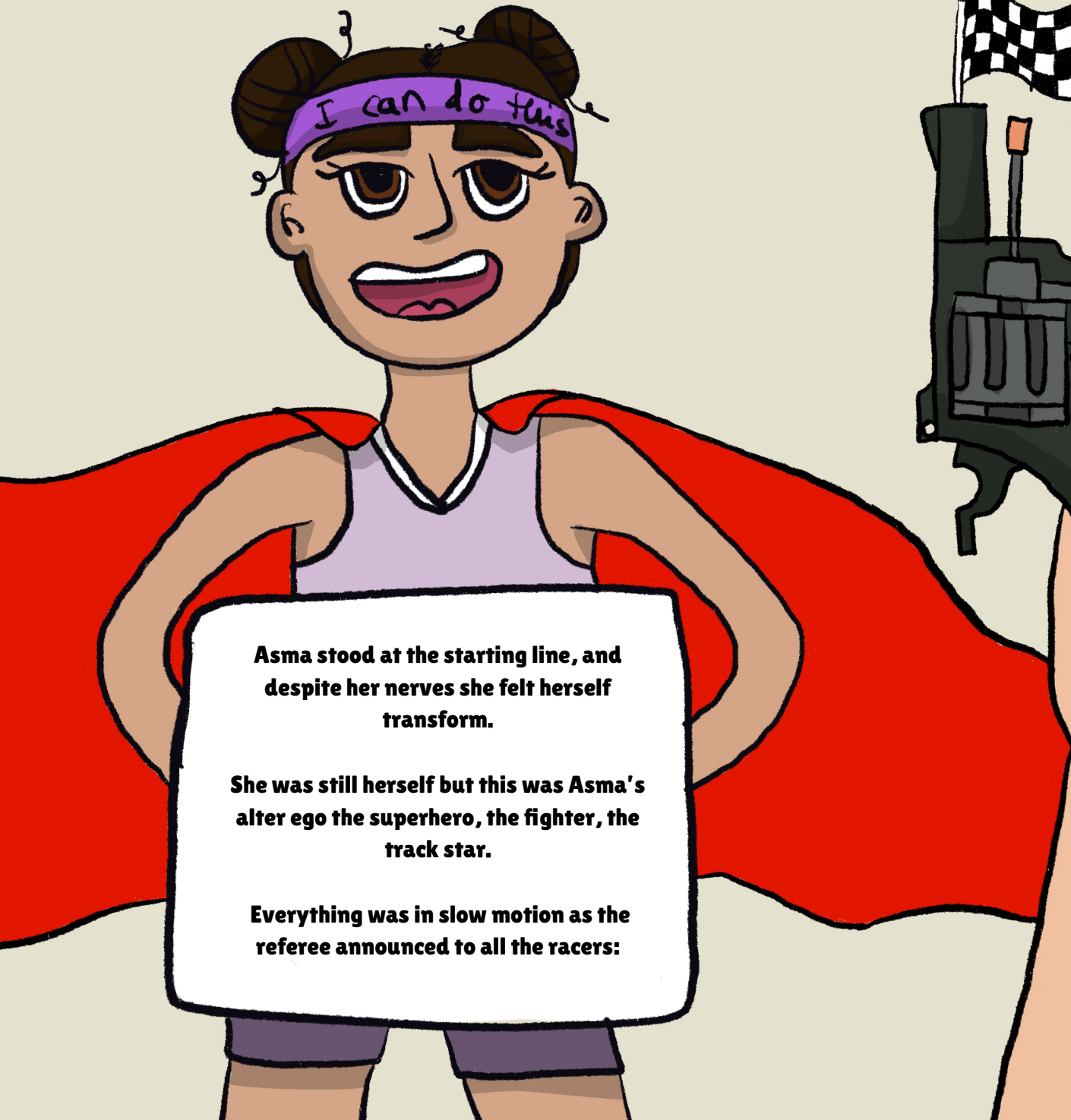
She stomped excitedly back to the bus with a repaired spirit, and she chanted her affirmations confidently,

Asma, you have got this!

“With strength & speed,
I’ll take the lead,
Believing in myself
I will succeed.”

She chanted.





Asma stood at the starting line, and despite her nerves she felt herself transform.

She was still herself but this was Asma's alter ego the superhero, the fighter, the track star.

Everything was in slow motion as the referee announced to all the racers:

“STAND UP!”

heart beating and getting into position.

“ON YOUR MARKS!”

“GET SET”

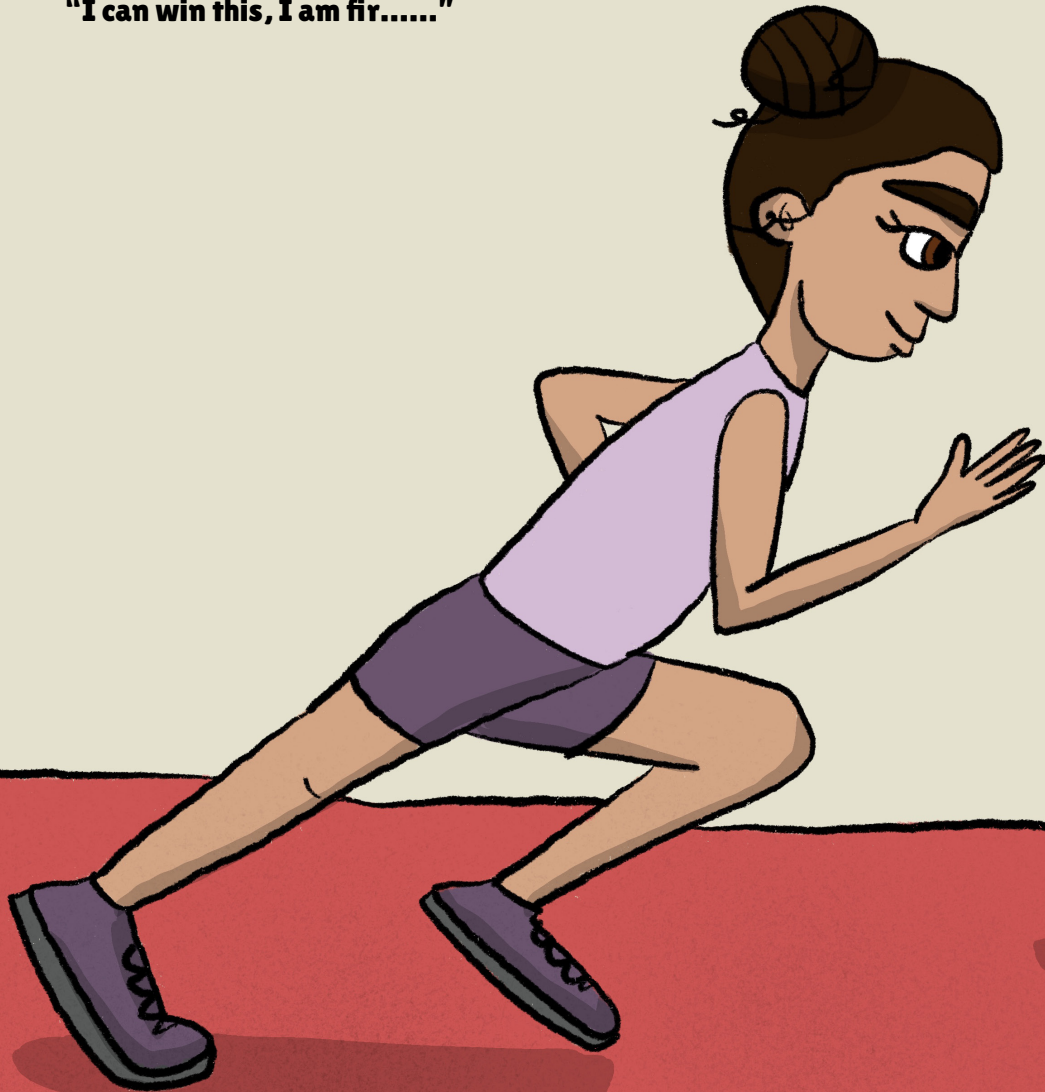
one breath out.

“GO!”

Asma felt herself push off the ground with a new speed she never knew she had,

"I'm doing so well," she thought to herself briefly,

"I can win this, I am fir....."

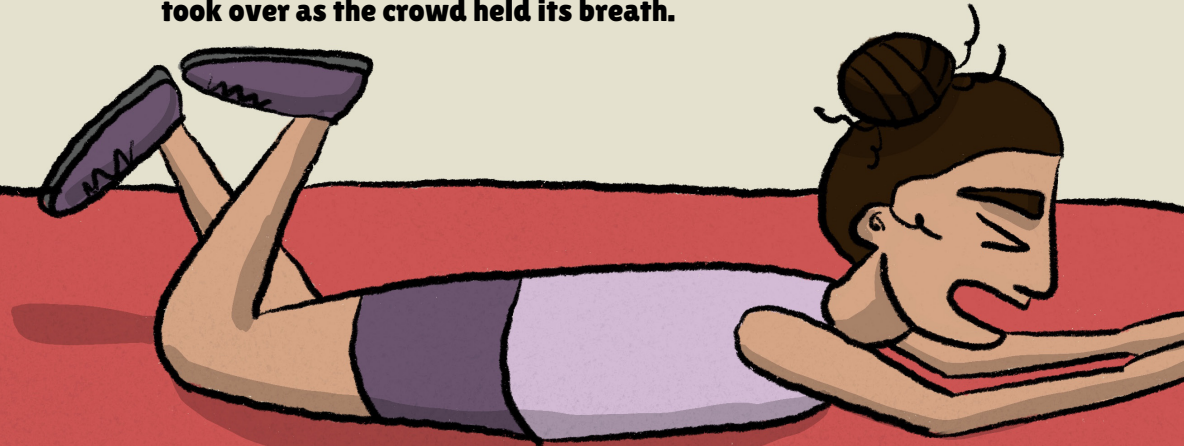


BOOOOOO
OOOOOM

Suddenly Asma finds herself on the ground, and she screams "NOOOOO!"

She wanted to cry, but her instincts kick in, getting herself up and ignoring everything her body was telling her.

Asma could usually hear the crowd at this point, but now silence took over as the crowd held its breath.



She just wanted to get her first place back. She ran scrambling all the elegance she had before was lost.

Okay she was catching up to third place...

"GOTCHA!" Now she was getting close to second place...

3RD Place

"FOCUS... AND GOTCHA TOO!"

2ND Place

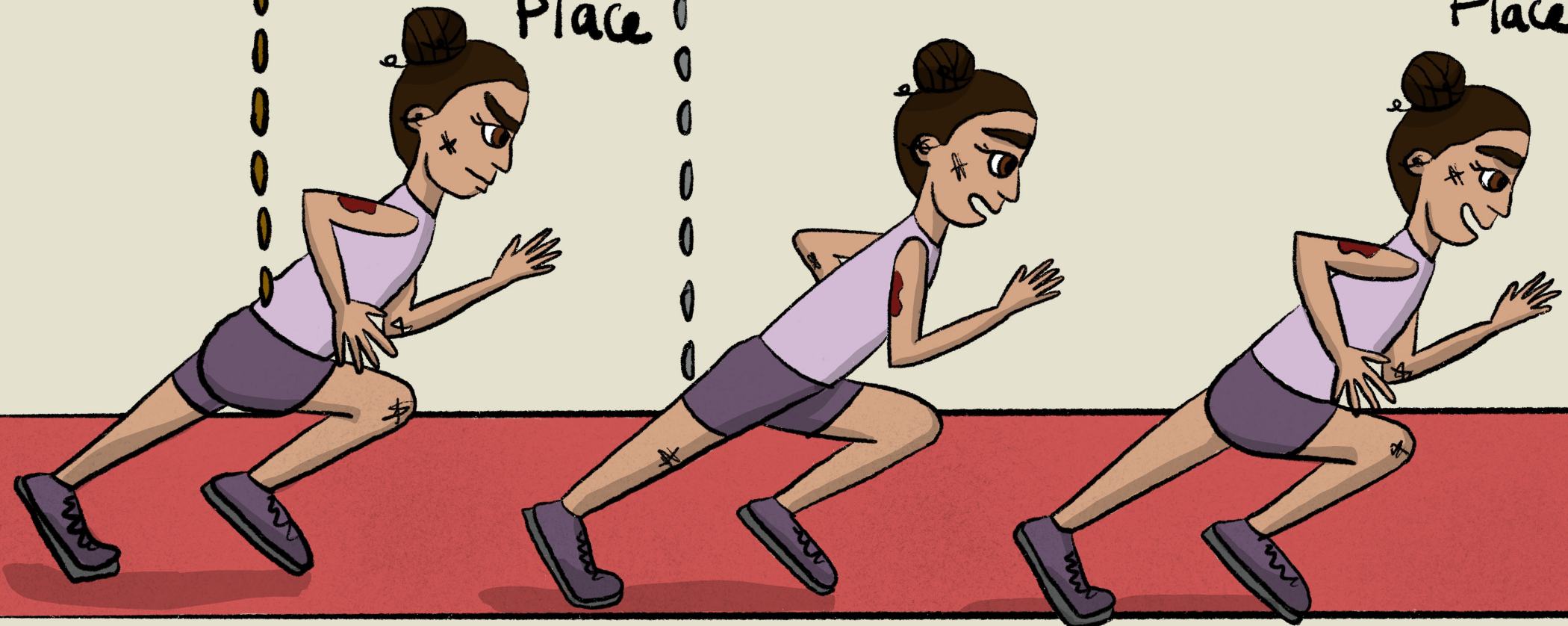
First place is tough, Asma's getting tired, she felt like she could not catch up,

When suddenly the girl in first place seemed to be getting closer.

"Do I have a chance?" Asma thought mustering up whatever power she had left and pushed.

At the last moment she felt herself dive for the finish line.

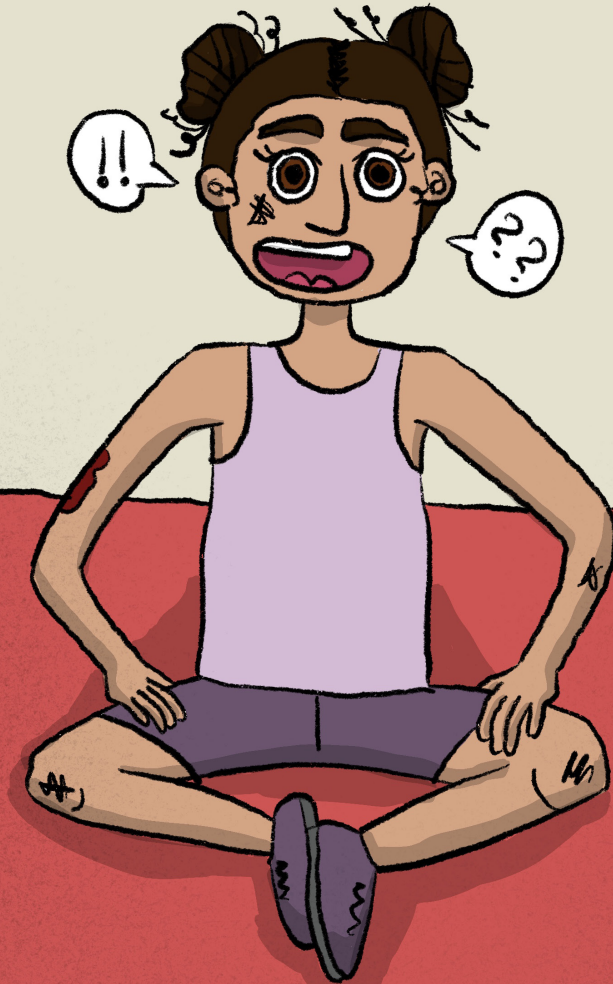
1ST Place



Asma sits after the finish line, shocked, tired, confused, proud, nauseous, and happy all at the same time.

“DID I, DO IT?”

she thought to herself.



All her teammates ran towards her screaming and cheering her name,

“ I DID IT?! I DID ITTT!” Asma screams, as she knew the answer and she felt like she can finally relax.

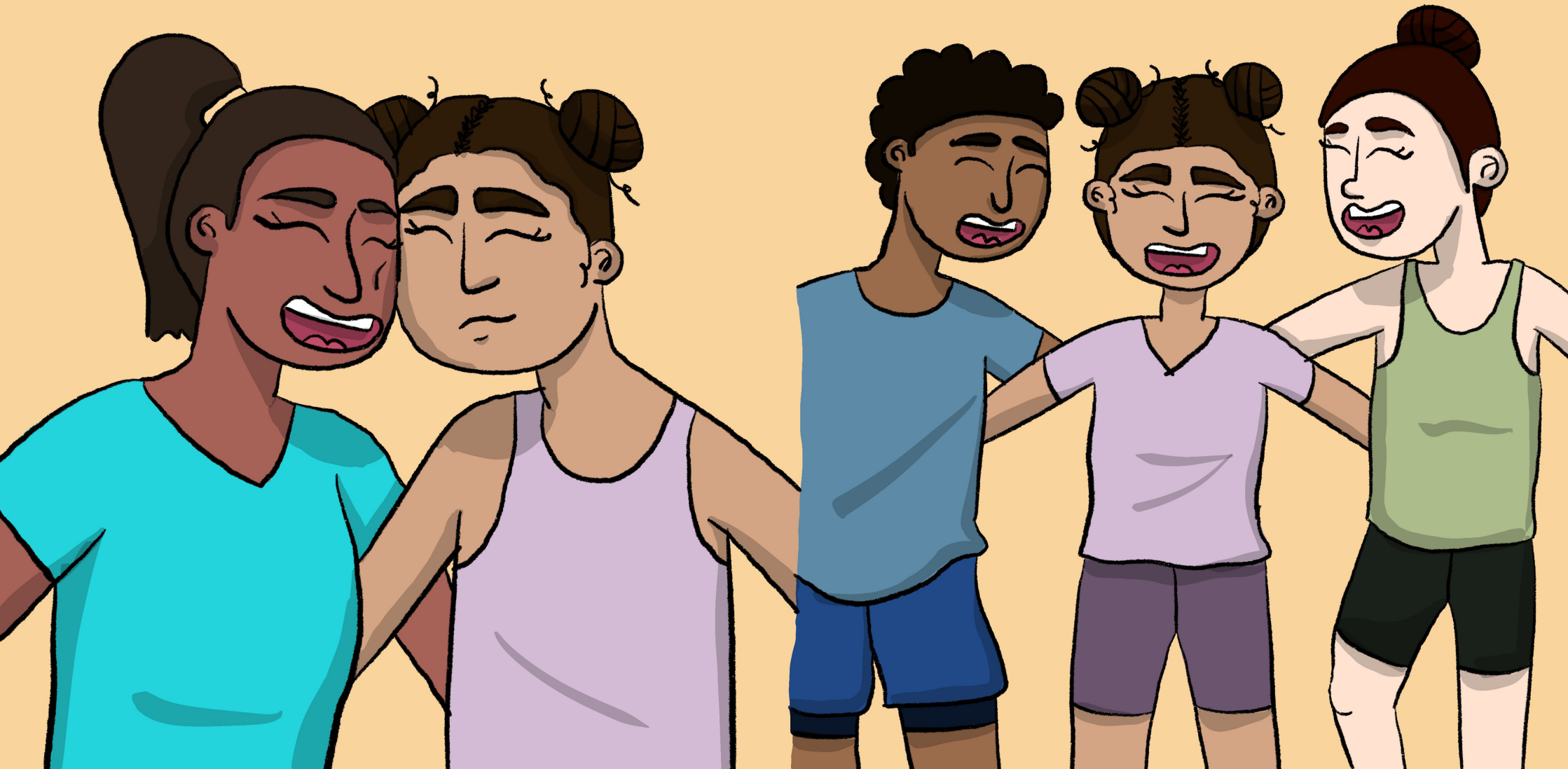
Although she was in her superhero alter ego, Asma fell, but what made her better than a hero was that she got back up again and fought for her place.

As she walked back to her bag, all the coaches of the opposing teams congratulated her for her bravery and determination.

Coach Alice came to her and hugged her tightly saying, "I know you were scared before the race, I'm glad you faced your fears today, and you did not give up, because that's what makes us strong; I am proud of you!"

Asma was happy she did not avoid today's race, even if she fell down during it. The respect and positive comments she got not only from her own team, but also opposing ones made her feel really good.

This motivated Asma to continue running more passionately than before, to hopefully one day inspire other little girls.



The minute the bus reached her school Asma ran to The Hazelnut.

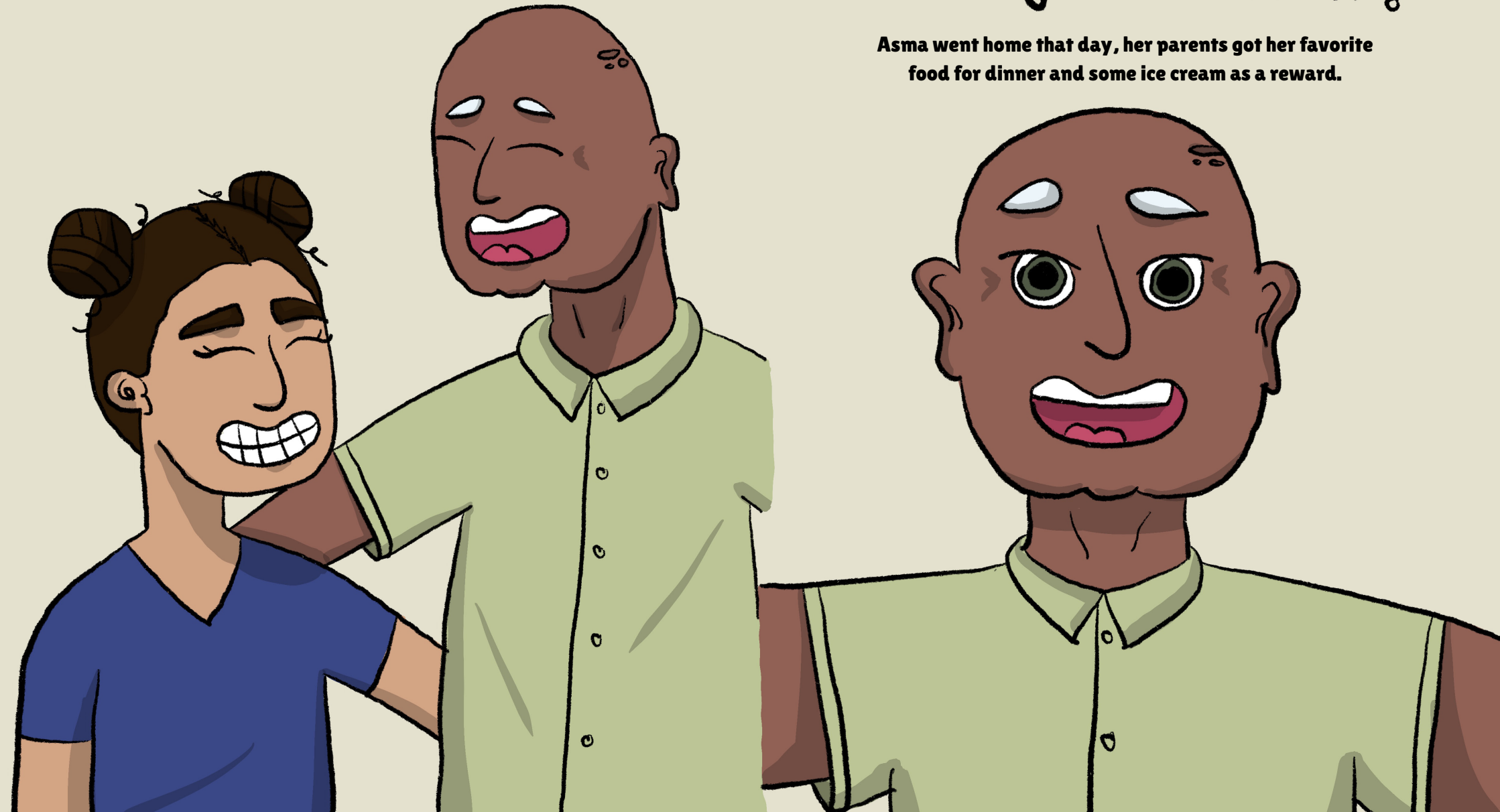
"I DID IT! I DID IT! You believed in me, and I was able to do it!"

Asma's voice echoed through the quiet mini market.

The old man replied excitedly

**"See little Cheetah,
I knew you can do it!"**

**Asma went home that day, her parents got her favorite
food for dinner and some ice cream as a reward.**



Although the race did not go as expected, Asma was happy. Those classmates who said she could not do sports just because she was a girl were wrong.

All the girls that made her feel like less of a girl for focusing on track, and the boys that made fun of her for it and said she was trying to be a boy were all wrong.

She felt silly for taking those kids' words to heart and letting them affect her, but she knew that was normal and it was not her fault.



Now, she was more confident than ever, and tomorrow she will proudly walk to take her gold medal in front of the whole school.



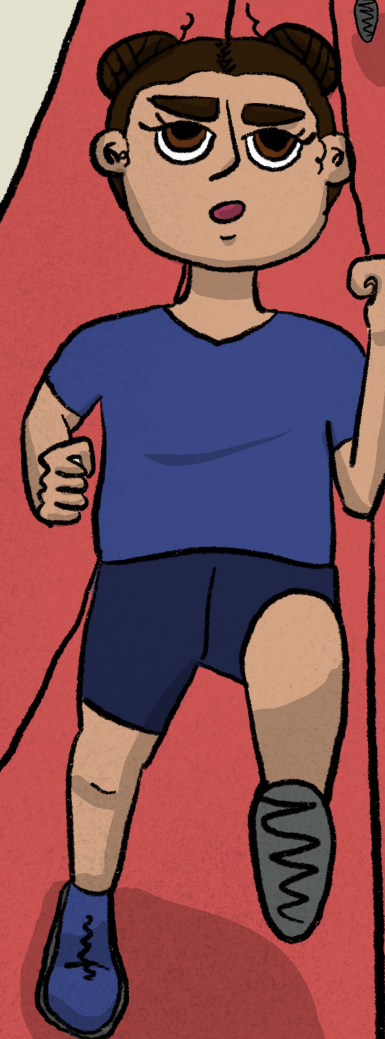
"A round of applause, for a brave little girl, who got back up and ran with her whole heart, Asma! With a gold medal in the hundred meter race, making her school very proud." The principle announces in front of the school.

As Asma was leaving the stage area, all her classmates came up to her and said "We're sorry we said you couldn't do sports, and you still got first even after you fell."

YOU WERE AWESOME!"



Asma blushed, she forgave her friends for their comments and she felt a warmth of happiness spread through her. They finally understood why she loved this sport so much, and even some of the girls were encouraged to try out for the track team after that.



Asma was glad that she stuck to her decision and did what was right instead of listening to others.

She faced her fears, believed in herself, and was determined to continue what she loved despite repeated mocking from peers, her fear, and anxiety.

Asma now realized that it is okay to feel anxious or scared, but it is important to know that even heroes fall, and that is what makes them real as they always get back up with determination to do better.