

The bass drops, and Shelly Kowalski throws her whole back into the headbang, relieved she has the barrier to hold onto for support...otherwise, she'd be afraid of toppling over.

They really ought to make workouts for live-music goers.

*Do they make workouts for live-music goers?*

“Alright, all you motherfuckers: I want this side to go to the left, and this side to go to the right—yeah, you—make some space in the middle! Now, on the count of three, I want all of us to converge in the middle for. A. Wall. Of. DEEEEEATH!”

Shelly plasters herself to the barrier because, at over 40, she might be too old for this shit.

“One...two...THREEEEE!”

The lead singer lets out a deathcore scream, and all the dancing bodies—taut with anticipation—hop, run, and flail into each other as the drummer goes ham. From her spot pressed against the barrier, Shelly throws some devil horns in solidarity. As her body undulates to the beat—which the drummer and bassist keep with expert consistency—her eyes sweep the crowd for her concert buddy, Alexandria “Ria”, and her blinding-white hair. More than 10 years her junior, Ria’s body is built for this shit, and Shelly lost her a while ago to the mosh pit.

A security guard passes by with a ream of water, and hands appear from everywhere like a Broadway flagship number; Shelly grabs a bottle for herself, shoves it into her ample cleavage—held up by a custom corset—and starts tossing others back into the crowd.

At some point, she became a den mother, but such is the life cycle.

(We have the privilege to live long enough to become the pit mom.)

Shelly guzzles the water with enough enthusiasm that some spills out the side of her mouth and mingles with the sheen of sweat now covering her bare flesh and the rivulets underneath her clothes, making all her undergarments damp.

Or maybe that's the lead singer.

Whatever.

The crowd finally settles back into a writhing mass as the song nears its end, and Shelly screams out her enthusiasm, hoping the roughness in the back of her throat has to do with the smoke machine and all the hollering and not because she's coming down with something from the masses. The lead guitarist stands lewdly on the stage in her section as his solo replaces the album fade out, and Shelly whoops her appreciation as she reaches her hands toward him; her opinion is: if you're going to stand up front, then you damn well better give back the energy to the band.

She reminds herself not to lock her knees, which are already beginning to feel the strain. If Shelly were 15 years younger, she'd be drunk enough not to feel the ache in her knees and feet, but she no longer gets drunk at shows—not since she passed 31—and while her kidneys and bladder thank her, her joints are another story entirely. Shelly is two wolves—one who wants to rock out at this concert forever, and the other who already wants to be sitting down and eating a slice while guzzling soda.

A body presses into her, and Shelly is ready to throw hands, but it's merely Ria—who screams in her ear (thank GOD, Shelly remembered her earplugs) when the outro transitions into an intro—so Shelly stands down. Instead, she turns around to match energy, clasp hands and jumping in a circle until Ria is at barrier, reaching toward the lead singer.

Tomorrow is going to be a bitch, but Shelly wouldn't trade the stiff joints, sore muscles, and misused throat for anything.