

## Chapter One

# Who Am I?

My name is Lucy Graves and I am a rugby player. I'm supposed to be writing the essay portion of my scholarship application, and it has to be so dazzling that I score all the full-ride money I need to attend college. How's it going? Not so dazzling. It's nearing the end of third period, I'm in the cave-like school library holed up at one of the quiet back study tables, and I'm stuck. The essay prompt is an open-ended

question that I just can't answer. On the scholarship form in bold, cartoony letters is the question:

## **WHO AM I?**

I'll let that sink in for a moment.

What sinister person wrote this question? How many seventeen-year-olds can answer it? Not me. After all, I'm not just one thing all the time. If there's anything true about me, it's that I'm existing in a constant state of chaos. Hello, I'm in high school.

For example, I'm a student athlete trying to maintain my straight-A average while I train nonstop to be the best rugby player this school has ever seen. I'm also a carboholic (I've got this super important championship-qualifying game after school—no biggie) and sometimes I need mac and cheese like my life depends on it. My life might actually depend on winning this game, so I ate a container that I brought from home in the

few minutes I had between classes. My jam-packed schedule doesn't allow for a proper lunch break, so I eat when I can. This afternoon, when my well-meaning guidance counselor, Ms. Bean, handed me the form with her pointy fake nails, she encouraged me to fill it out and include as many personal details as possible. Fine, here goes.

### **VERY IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT ME**

1. I am the daughter of a single mother (who is completely awesome, by the way).
2. I am biracial (my mom is pasty white Irish, and my dad was a Black man from Trinidad, thank you very much).
3. I have a strong academic record (I take all advanced-placement courses).
4. I am Blue Mountain High's top athlete (and not just top female athlete, ahem).
5. In case you didn't catch the past tense in item

#2, I have a dead dad (oh yeah, it's completely tragic).

6. I like to make lists (it calms me down).

Okay, the fifth and sixth points might be overkill. The scholarship people don't really need to know my sad story, do they? They definitely don't need to know about my borderline OCD. Did I say "borderline"? I meant overwhelming. Ha!

Okay, focus. *My name is Lucy Graves and I am a rugby player.* Who am I? Well, right now I'm an emotional wreck because if I don't get my team to the finals, and if I don't win, then I won't secure my status as the best fly-half Blue Mountain High has ever seen, and I won't get an athletic scholarship, and I won't go to college to play rugby, and I won't get the education that my mom can't afford, and I won't see the world, and I won't get a good job, and I won't ever become anything important, and I might as well curl up and die right now because,

as the great Mariah Carey would say, my future is bleak, bleak, bleak.

*My name is Lucy Graves and I am a rugby player.* God, why can't I get past this thought? *Stop thinking about it, Lucy.* I shift my focus to watching video replays on my phone of last season's games against our main rivals, the Riverside Grizzlies. They're the ones we're playing today, and I am not looking forward to it.

As I listen to the sound of rugby through my earbuds, it transports me back to the last game we played against the Grizzlies.

*Mud squelching, players yelling to each other, whistles blowing. The ball hurtles toward me as I run through the pouring rain. I reach for it with fingers numbed by cold and feel its textured surface make contact. There's no time to hesitate. I plant my posts deep in the slippery field to secure my footing in the mud before hugging the ball close and taking off down the pitch. Blood whooshes in*

*my ears. My body burns hot. Push past the pain in your knees, Lucy. Push past the pain in your lungs. The constant pain in your neck.*

*The opposing team thunders toward me as I weave through their huge defensive players. Their props and locks aim to take me down hard, throwing their bodies at me with abandon as I run past. My teammates shout to one another along the length of the field, waiting to catch the ball if I toss it back to them. They keep just behind me so we don't drive the play offside. I'm almost there.*

*"Hard!" Coach Stevens yells from the sideline. I've got to pour it on now. Footfalls pound behind me, gaining on me. The other team is close, but I'm closer. With a final surge I cross the try line. I stumble and feel the rough embrace of my pursuer on the back of my jersey. We fall in a tumble of knees and elbows and cleats, but it's too late for the other team. I've scored the winning points of the game with only*

*seconds to spare. I'd jump up and celebrate with my screaming teammates, but I'm too gassed out to move. I lie on the soaking-wet grass, feeling alive, sucking air, covered in mud and grime and sweat. I taste blood on my lower lip. I must have bitten it, but it doesn't matter. The pain is worth it. It's always worth it.*

Watching the video, I can see just how close I had been to being taken down. Half a second slower and I would have been toast. I could have passed the ball during my charge several times, but I was too focused on myself. When I'm in the zone I just can't help it. I had to run to the try line. I had to win.

#### **TOP FIVE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT RUGBY**

1. The contact (I love to get tackled, and I love how rough it is).
2. Running (nothing makes me feel more alive).
3. Scoring (what can I say? I live for the glory).

4. Outsmarting the other team (so satisfying).
5. The temporary calm I feel after a match (the only time I feel calm).

The Blue Mountain Eagles, the girls rugby team at my high school, is one of the best in the district, but the Riverside Grizzlies have us beat in the size department by a wide margin. The last time we played them was not pretty. We won (barely), and we were hurting for weeks.

As I absentmindedly palm the trusty and tattered rugby ball I carry with me everywhere, I search the video footage for some clue, some weakness we can exploit. It's up to me as team captain to call the plays on the field, and I don't know if I can find a way to beat them. Not without all of us getting maimed, anyway.

*My name is Lucy Graves and I am a rugby player.*  
I can feel my stomach starting to burn and I wonder

how much Pepto-Bismol I'll have to chug before going out on the field so I don't barf up stomach acid. Who am I? I'm seventeen and I'm pretty sure I have an ulcer. My mostly uneaten snack sits on the library table—it's the same disgusting-slash-amazing Graves family secret recipe potato-salad sandwich my mom makes me on game days because she knows how I like to keep everything the same. And also, CARBS. But today the first bite of the sandwich got stuck going down, and ever since then I've felt like I have a rock lodged in my throat. It's getting hard to breathe. It's hot in here. Can you die from being nervous?

"Who am I?" I say out loud, as I stare at the pile of papers on the table. I lean back, pull my earbuds from my ears and toss my rugby ball high into the air.

"Uh, I believe your name is Lucy Graves, and you're a rugby player," says a voice from behind me.

I whirl around in my chair as my ball lands on the table with a loud thud. It's a boy. Red hair. Freckles. Adorable. Smiling at me. Excuse me while I curl up and die.

## Chapter Two Distractions

*My name is Lucy Graves and I've been talking to myself. Again. I really must get a handle on this.*

"Um," I say to the redheaded guy staring at me.  
"I was just—"

"Talking to yourself? Yeah, I gathered that." He's definitely laughing at me now, and if he didn't have a British lilt to his voice and if he wasn't so tall and prince-like, I'd probably be angry. Wait a minute. Prince-like? Barf. Who am I? Oh yeah. *My name is*