

# Cathy Hopkins

Mates,  
Dates &  
Inflatable  
Bras



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## Chapter 1

# What Makes Me 'Me'?

If she picks me out in class again, I shall scream.

Wacko Watkins. That's what I call her. Our new teacher. We've got her for PSHE first period this morning, worse luck.

'I wonder what kind of weird project she's got lined up to torture us with this week,' I said as we hurried down the corridor to get to our classroom before second bell.

'She's OK as teachers go,' said Izzie. 'She makes you think about stuff. And she seems really interested in what we feel. I like her lessons.'

'Well I don't,' I said. 'It's bad enough having a mum who's a shrink without getting it at school as well. I get that "let's all share our feelings" stuff at home. I wish Watkins would

give me a break here. She always singles me out.'

'Probably because you're quiet in class. She's trying to find out what's going on in that daft head of yours. You're lucky. At least your mum and dad bother to ask what's going on. All mine care about are my marks. Whether I get A, B or C. I think I'd faint from shock if either of them ever asked how I actually *felt* about anything.'

Izzie's my best mate. Or was. I'm not sure any more. Not since Nesta Williams arrived at the end of last term. Izzie and I have hung out together since junior school. It's always been me and Izzie. Izzie and me. Sharing everything. Clothes. Make-up. CDs. Secrets. And then along comes Nesta and I reckon it's two's company, three's a crowd. But I seem to be the only one who sees it that way. I'm going to have to tackle Izzie about it but I rarely get her on her own these days.

'Hurry along and take your places, girls,' called Miss Watkins, coming up behind us.

I hope she hadn't heard what I said about her.

Miss Watkins is a bit odd looking. Make that very odd looking. She looks like she put a finger in an electric socket. Her expression is always startled, like a cartoon character who's seen something shocking and their eyes pop out. She's as thin as a wire and her hair's frizzy grey, coiling out at all angles.

‘OK, girls, now settle down,’ she said. ‘We’ve got a lot to talk about today.’

Here we go. Talk. Talk. Let’s talk. I wish we could read today. Quietly. Or write. Quietly. Why do we have to talk? Doesn’t anyone realise I’m going through a quiet-but-mysterious phase? Like Geri when she split from the Spice Girls.

As Wacko perched on the corner of her desk and hitched her skirt up, we all got an eyeful of her pale legs above knee-high stockings. She has skin like cling film. Transparent. You can see all the veins underneath it. Enough to bring up your breakfast first thing in the morning, I can tell you.

‘There’s a few things I want you to start thinking about for the rest of the term,’ she continued. ‘As you probably know, it’s soon going to be time to choose your GCSE subjects for next year. Which ones you want to do.’

Inwardly I groaned. I’ve been dreading this. See, I don’t know. Haven’t a clue. Not the faintest.

‘I know it’s a lot to think about and I don’t want any of you to panic or feel pressurised. We’ve plenty of time, that’s why I want you to give it some attention now so it doesn’t come as a big rush later on.’

Too late, I thought. I’m already in major panic mode.

‘I want you to think about your future. Your goals. Ambitions. What you want to be when you’re older. Right, anybody got any ideas?’

She started to look round the class so I put my head down and tried to become invisible.

‘Lucy?’

I knew. See. I knew it would be me she asked first.

‘Yes, miss?’

‘Let’s get the ball rolling. Any idea what you’d like to do?’

I could feel myself going red as everyone turned to look at me.

Duhhh? I dunno. Doctor. Nah. Too much blood. Dentist. Nah. Fiddling about in people’s mouths all day. Yuk. Vet? Yes. Vet. I love animals. After Izzie, Ben and Jerry, our Labradors, are my next best friends. So, vet? I could be on all those animal rescue programmes on telly, looking glam as I save poor animals. Maybe not. Ben stood on a piece of glass last week. I almost fainted when the vet said he’d have to have a few stitches in his paw. I couldn’t watch. Had to leave the room like a right sissy. He was fine after but I can’t bear to see an animal in pain. So probably not the best career choice. So what else? What?

‘Don’t know, miss,’ I blurted out, wishing she’d choose someone else.

‘No idea at all?’ she asked.

I shook my head.

Candice Carter put her hand up. She was bursting.

Thankfully Wacko turned to her.

‘Candice?’

‘Lifeguard, Miss Watkins.’

‘Lifeguard. Now that’s an original one. And why do you want to be a lifeguard?’

‘So I can give all the boys the kiss of life, miss.’

Everyone cracked up laughing. She’s such a tart, Candice Carter.

‘Anyone got any more sensible suggestions?’ asked Miss Watkins, looking round.

By now, half the class had their hands up.

‘Writer,’ said Mary O’ Connor.

‘Nurse,’ said Joanne Richards.

‘Air hostess,’ said Gabby Jones.

‘TV presenter,’ said Jade Wilcocks.

‘Hairdresser,’ said Mo Harrison.

‘Rich and famous,’ said Nesta and everyone laughed again.

Everyone knows what they want to do. Everyone. But me.

I’m fourteen. Everyone’s always saying, ‘Oh don’t grow up too fast’ and ‘Enjoy your youth’, now suddenly it’s, ‘What’re you going to do with the rest of your life?’

‘Excellent,’ said Miss Watkins. ‘Those who know what they want to do are lucky. And those who don’t,’ she looked pointedly at me, ‘don’t worry. You don’t have to decide today. But it does help to have some inkling of

what direction you might like to go in when it comes to choosing your subjects later. For those of you who don't know, we'll have a look at it all over the next few weeks. In fact, a good starting point is to take a look at who you are now. Identify your strengths and weaknesses. The seeds of today are the fruits of tomorrow. The thoughts of today are the actions of tomorrow. So, to start with, I'm going to give you an essay to be handed in at the end of term. Doesn't have to be too long. A page or so.'

She picked up her chalk and turned to the blackboard.

*What makes me 'me'?* she wrote.

'That's your title. I'll give you fifteen minutes now to make a few notes.'

She wrote a few more questions up on the board.

*Who am I?*

*What are my interests?*

*What do I want? What are my goals in life?*

*What are my strengths and weaknesses?*

*What would I like to do as a career?*

For the last part of the lesson, I could see everyone scribbling madly.

I knew what Izzie would be writing. She wants to be a singer. Has done since we were nine. She writes all her own songs and plays guitar. She wants to be the next Alanis Morissette. She even looks like her now. She's got

the same long dark hair and she wears the same hippie dippie clothes. Not my taste, but they suit Iz.

I glanced across at Nesta. She was writing frantically as well. Typical. She's so sure of herself and where she's going. She wants to be a model and will probably get there. She's totally gorgeous-looking. Her dad's Italian so she's got his straight black hair, like silk right down to her waist, and her mum's Jamaican so she's got her dark skin and eyes. She could easily be Naomi Campbell's younger sister. Tall and skinny with an amazing pixie face.

I wish I was black. They have the best skin, even when they're old. Like Nesta's mum. I've seen her on telly. She reads the news on Cable. She's ancient, at least forty, but she only looks about twenty. I'm the typical 'English rose', pale, blonde and boring. I'd rather be a tropical flower, like Nesta, all exotic and colourful.

I stared at the blank piece of paper in front of me.

What makes me 'me'? I began to write.

I'm small and don't look my age. People always think I'm in Year Seven or Eight.

I stared out of the window hoping for inspiration. Jobs for little people. Maybe I could audition to be one of the Munchkins if they ever remake *The Wizard of Oz*? They're tiny. Or Mini Me in the next Austin Powers movie.

And what are you going to be when you grow up, Nesta? Model.

And you, Izzie? Singer-songwriter.

Lucy? Mini Me.

Yeah. Right. Now I'm being plain stupid. I must have some decent ideas locked in my brain somewhere.

I made myself concentrate. What makes me 'me'?

*I'm the youngest in my family.*

Fifteen minutes later and that was all I'd written.

'Just before the bell goes,' said Miss Watkins, 'I'd like to give you all a profile sheet to fill out. Purely for yourselves to help get you started if you're stuck. Nobody needs to see them, they're only for you, to get you thinking along different lines.'

I looked at the sheet of paper she handed me.

Help. I'm usually good at essays and stuff. But this time I haven't a clue. I don't know who I am. Or what makes me 'me'.

Or what I'm going to do when I grow up.

Or where I fit.