

Gia wants to play rugby.

For as long as she can remember, she has watched games from the sidelines, wishing she could be out there too.

She imagines herself sprinting down the field,
the ball in her hands,
scoring a try as the crowd goes wild.

Her brother plays rugby. He goes to practice every week.

They run, pass, and tumble into the mud.

"That looks like so much fun!" Gia thinks. Her eyes light up as she watches her brother sprint down the field.

One day, Gia decides to join her brother at rugby practice.

"How hard can it be?" she says to herself.

Cleats in one hand,
water bottle in the other,
she marches over to the field, buzzing with excitement.
She spends the whole practice running along the side of the field, but no one passes to her.
"I'm open!" she yells, jumping up and down, waving her arms to get the boys' attention.
But the ball goes somewhere else.

Gia slows to a walk, her feet suddenly feeling heavy, like they didn't want to move anymore.

She steps off the field as tears start slipping down her cheeks.

"They don't want me there," she thinks to herself as she walks home alone.

"Maybe I'm just not good at rugby," she sighs.

The next day, as Gia is walking home from school, she spots some girls running around on the field. They're tossing a ball around— a rugby ball!

"Wait a second— they're playing rugby!" Gia squeaks in surprise.

She stops at the edge of the field and watches for a moment, eyes wide.

She thought rugby was only for boys, but these girls are playing confidently. They're laughing as they play, passing the ball to one another with ease.

The girls notice her standing nearby and wave her over to join them.

She takes a step closer, then stops, her excitement mixing with hesitation.

"Do they really want me?" Gia thinks to herself.

She takes a breath. "Maybe I can try."

Gia jogs over to the girls, her stomach in knots as she approaches them nervously.

"I thought only boys played rugby," Gia tells them.

"No way!" the girls tell her, "Girls can play rugby too. Anyone can play!"

"Really?" G says doubtfully.

She had only ever seen boys play rugby before.

She looks across the field again. The girls are running, tackling, passing, and cheering one another on, just like the boys.

"Do you want to join our team?" the girls ask Gia.

Gia hesitates. "What if I'm not good enough?" she thinks. "When I tried to play with the boys, they never passed to me."

"I'm not very good at rugby," she tells them sadly.

One of the girls steps forward, putting a hand on Gia's shoulder. "Don't worry, no one starts a superstar; it takes practice! We all play differently."

"Yeah!" another girl jumps forward,

"I was nervous when I first started playing, too.

But we all have our skills.

We just need to find out what yours is."

Gia is skeptical. "What could I even do?" she wonders aloud.

The girls grin.

"We can show you," one of them says.

One girl sprints past everyone,

Another makes a big tackle,

One shouts directions,

Another kicks the ball down the field.

Gia watches closely.

"See?" one of the girls says, "There's more than one way to play."

One of the girls hands Gia a ball.

"Come play with us!" the girls say, smiling in encouragement.

At first, Gia feels a little nervous,

but the girls cheer her on.

They start passing the ball back and forth.

They start a small practice game, running across the field and calling each other's names.

"Nice catch!"

"Great kick!"

"Good run!"

Soon, Gia is running alongside her new teammates, laughing and trying her best as her nerves melt away.

Just then —

Suddenly, the ball pops free, rolling across the grass right towards G's feet.
She scoops it up.
Gia sees her teammate racing down the field, right into open space.
"I'm open," her teammate cries, "pass right!"
Gia pauses.
She remembers when no one passed to her.
Her hands tighten on the ball. She could keep it... or pass.
This time, she passes.

The ball sails through the air.

Her teammate catches the ball, sprinting down the field to score a try.
Her teammates cheer.
"Great pass!"
"Your pass made the play!"
"That was amazing!"
Her teammates' words of encouragement rang in her ears.

Gia smiles.
She doesn't have to be the fastest.
Or the strongest.

She just has to be Gia.

And that is enough.

There is a place for her on the field—
just as she is.