

Lily 9

The chapter opens with Lily reflecting on the gendered nature of objects and concepts in the world, from hurricanes to musical instruments. She observes how societal norms unconsciously shape choices, even in third grade when children pick their instruments. At the Coös County Honors Orchestra rehearsal, she notes the stark gender divisions: brass and percussion dominated by boys, flutes and harps by girls, and strings split by pitch depth. Lily finds irony in how these patterns emerge from childhood decisions, yet she admires outliers like a girl playing drums or a boy on piccolo, who defy expectations.

The rehearsal begins with the oboist, Maya, providing the tuning note, followed by the orchestra's chaotic attempt at John Williams' "Star Wars" theme. The conductor, Mr. Pawlawski, endures the dissonance with visible frustration, signaling a challenging semester ahead. Lily's wry humor surfaces as she compares the noise to a dystopian Star Wars scene, highlighting the group's initial lack of cohesion. The scene underscores the tension between artistic ambition and reality, while Lily's internal commentary adds a layer of wit and self-awareness.

Lily then shifts to a personal reflection, recalling how she chose the cello in third grade—a decision influenced by gendered expectations. She contrasts her father's insistence on her presenting as a boy with strangers perceiving her femininity, leaving her puzzled about what truly signals gender to others. This introspection reveals her early awareness of societal constraints and the confusion they caused, even as she gravitated toward the cello, an instrument straddling the line between "masculine" and "feminine" associations.

The chapter closes with Lily's musings on identity and performance, both musical and personal. The orchestra's struggles mirror her own navigation of gender norms, while the outliers in the ensemble—like the girl percussionist—offer hope for breaking free

from expectations. Her narrative blends humor, observation, and vulnerability, painting a vivid picture of adolescence where sound, gender, and self-discovery intertwine. The recurring theme of "running the gender maze" ties the chapter together, emphasizing the invisible yet pervasive forces shaping individual choices.

