

# Lily 5

The chapter opens with Lily reflecting on the common advice to "just be yourself," highlighting how this simplistic notion fails to acknowledge the risks and complexities of authenticity, especially for marginalized individuals. She recalls a childhood memory of secretly trying on her mother's lipstick before a T-ball game, illustrating her early awareness of her identity conflicting with societal expectations. The moment underscores her fear of rejection, as she hastily wiped off the lipstick when her father called, unable to voice her truth. This memory sets the tone for the chapter, exploring themes of self-acceptance and the struggle to exist authentically in an unaccepting world.

Lily contrasts her childhood silence with the bravery of those who come out young, questioning why she lacked the courage to assert her identity earlier. She describes her subsequent strategy of living "invisibly" to avoid confrontation, rejecting the romanticized notion of invisibility as a superpower. Instead, she frames it as a painful coping mechanism born from societal rejection. The narrative shifts to the present, where Lily plays the Schubert *Arpeggione* Sonata on her cello—a piece tied to her suicide attempt—while her mother observes her with concern, prompting a conversation about visibility and freedom.

The interaction with her mother reveals layers of guilt and gratitude. Lily acknowledges her mother's sacrifices, from relocating their family to homeschooling her after bullying incidents, to supporting her transition. Yet she also resents her mother's resignation to middle-aged invisibility, seeing it as a surrender to societal dismissal. Their emotional exchange culminates when Lily's cello string snaps mid-performance, mirroring her frayed emotional state. As she breaks down in tears, she voices her fear of being a burden, asking her mother if she hates her for "wrecking" her life, revealing her deep-seated insecurities.

The chapter closes with Lily's mother comforting her, gently probing whether her distress relates to Asher's recent absence. Lily's ambivalent response ("No... Yes") hints at unresolved relationship tensions. The scene is punctuated by Boris the dog's empathetic sigh, subtly reinforcing the theme of unspoken emotional connections. Through this intimate mother-daughter moment, the chapter poignantly captures Lily's ongoing journey toward self-worth, the weight of familial sacrifice, and the fragile hope for acceptance—both from others and herself.

