

Lily 7

The chapter opens with Lily experiencing a mix of excitement and fear upon discovering that something she believed was only in her mind is real. She recounts attending a high school hockey game in Adams, New Hampshire, with her friend Maya, where Asher, a standout player, scores three goals. The game's intensity contrasts with the quieter moments afterward, as Lily observes the players' violent yet graceful movements. The scene shifts to a post-game party at Dirk's house, where Asher, instead of joining the rowdy hockey crowd, spends time talking thoughtfully with Lily and Maya on the porch, ignoring other girls who try to flirt with him.

Lily is struck by Asher's duality—his fierce athleticism on the ice versus his quiet, attentive demeanor off it. Their conversation ranges from the Pacific Ocean's vastness to sea otters' sleeping habits, showcasing Asher's curiosity. Later, Maya and Asher enthusiastically introduce Lily to a local delicacy: apple pie with steamed cheese. Despite her initial skepticism, Lily finds the dish surprisingly delicious. The trio's dynamic is highlighted as they bond over shared experiences, though Lily feels a pang of exclusion when Maya and Asher reminisce about their long-standing friendship.

As they sit in the diner, Lily's curiosity about Asher deepens, from how he takes his coffee to his childhood memories. When Asher asks if she misses California, Lily reflects on her past but avoids delving into painful details. Asher empathizes, expressing his own longing for places beyond their small town. The conversation turns to New Hampshire's harsh winters, with Maya and Asher joking about the challenges of "Mud Season." Lily's excitement about experiencing snow for the first time contrasts with their weariness of the long winters.

The chapter closes with Lily imagining future adventures with Asher and Maya, even as she grapples with feelings of being an outsider to their shared history. The evening leaves her with a sense of both connection and isolation, as she navigates her growing

fascination with Asher and the complexities of fitting into a new community. The chapter captures Lily's emotional journey, blending moments of warmth and belonging with undercurrents of uncertainty and longing.

