Mad Honey

Mad Honey (2022) by **Jodi Picoult** and **Jennifer Finney Boylan** is a **multi-layered novel** blending **mystery, courtroom drama, and LGBTQ+ themes**. The story follows **Olivia McAfee**, a beekeeper and single mother, whose son **Asher** stands accused of murdering his girlfriend, **Lily Campanello**. As the trial unfolds, secrets about Lily's transgender identity and Asher's volatile behavior emerge, forcing Olivia to confront her past—including her own escape from an abusive marriage.

The novel alternates between **Olivia's perspective** and **Lily's pre-death narrative**, weaving themes of **love, identity, violence, and survival**. The title *Mad Honey* refers to a toxic hallucinogenic honey, symbolizing the **sweet yet dangerous nature of relationships**.

Olivia 1

The chapter opens with Olivia reflecting on her initial desire to have a daughter, envisioning a future filled with shared experiences like manicures and school milestones. However, when her son Asher is born, she feels relief, believing a boy will be less vulnerable to life's hardships. This introspective moment sets the tone for Olivia's protective nature and foreshadows her later struggles with motherhood and loss. The narrative then shifts to her present life as a beekeeper in Adams, New Hampshire, where her family's apiary legacy shapes her identity and livelihood.

Olivia describes the town of Adams with its quaint, rural charm and darkly humorous history, including the misnamed Slade Brook. She recalls bringing her husband, Braden, to meet her parents, highlighting their early optimism and her certainty about

their future together. However, her life takes an unexpected turn when her father dies suddenly, leaving her to manage the family's beekeeping business. This event marks the beginning of her transition from a doctor's wife in Boston to a single mother and apiarist back in her hometown.

The chapter delves into Olivia's deepening connection to beekeeping, which becomes both a career and a coping mechanism. She expands the apiary, innovates with bee genetics, and builds a sustainable business, finding purpose in the work her father loved. She also reflects on the lessons he taught her—about patience, protection, and resilience—which mirror her own approach to life. These lessons take on greater significance as she navigates grief, single parenthood, and the challenges of maintaining the apiary.

The chapter closes with Olivia honoring her parents' deaths by following the tradition of informing the bees, a ritual that underscores her bond with both her family legacy and the natural world. This act symbolizes her acceptance of loss and her commitment to preserving what remains. Through her journey, Olivia emerges as a complex character shaped by love, tragedy, and the quiet strength she draws from her bees and her past.

Olivia 1

The chapter opens with Olivia reflecting on her initial desire to have a daughter, envisioning a future filled with shared moments like manicures and school bus rides. However, when her son Asher is born, she feels relief, believing a boy will be less vulnerable to the hardships she fears for a girl. This introspective moment sets the tone for Olivia's protective nature and her tendency to prepare for the worst, a theme that recurs throughout the chapter.

Olivia introduces her life as a beekeeper in Adams, New Hampshire, where her family's history is deeply rooted. She describes the town's quaint, unchanging character and the irony of Slade Brook's name, tied to a local undertaker's tragic demise. This backdrop highlights her connection to the land and her family's legacy. She recalls bringing her husband, Braden, to meet her parents, a memory tinged with nostalgia and the sharp contrast between her youthful optimism and the realities that later unfolded.

The narrative shifts to Olivia's unexpected return to her family's farm after her father's sudden death. Initially resistant to becoming a beekeeper, she gradually embraces the role, expanding the apiary and finding financial success. Her father's lessons about bees—emphasizing patience, protection, and the consequences of sudden actions—mirror her own life philosophy. These teachings become a metaphor for her resilience and the defensive mechanisms she develops, shaped by personal loss and hardship.

The chapter closes with Olivia honoring her parents' deaths by following the tradition of informing the bees, a ritual that underscores her deep respect for both her family's legacy and the natural world. The act of singing to the colonies, draped in black crepe, symbolizes her grief and her commitment to carrying forward her father's wisdom. This poignant moment encapsulates Olivia's journey from reluctance to acceptance,

weaving together themes of inheritance, adaptation, and the enduring bond between humans and nature.

Lily 1

The chapter opens with Lily reflecting on her strained relationship with her father, who had always wanted a son. Despite her attempts to connect with him, such as sharing trivia about a Rolling Stones song, he remains distant and dismissive. Lily’s mother, Ava, offers a contrasting source of support, calling her a "hero" as they embark on a move from Point Reyes to New Hampshire for a fresh start. Lily, however, remains skeptical, haunted by her past struggles, symbolized by the scars on her wrist, and wonders if this new beginning will truly change anything.

Lily’s narrative shifts to her present life in New Hampshire, where her boyfriend, Asher, promises an early Christmas gift, sparking speculation from her friend Maya. Lily feels a deep hunger to know every part of Asher’s life, especially the years she missed before meeting him. She takes pride in being the one he chose to sketch intimately, a contrast to Maya’s childhood memories with him. As Lily prepares for Asher’s arrival, she admires her reflection, embracing her appearance despite the scars, which Asher claims don’t matter—though they still weigh on her.

The chapter also highlights Lily’s mother, Ava, a formidable figure with unique skills, such as tracking and mnemonic tricks. Ava’s sharp observation of Asher’s boot print reveals her attention to detail, while her playful teaching methods, like the zodiac sentence, showcase her quirky yet nurturing side. Lily’s admiration for her mother’s resilience and strength is evident, contrasting sharply with her father’s disapproval. Ava’s presence serves as a grounding force in Lily’s life, offering stability amid her emotional turmoil.

The chapter concludes with Lily’s internal conflict between hope and skepticism. While her mother sees their move as a "second chance," Lily grapples with whether she can truly leave her past behind. Her scars, both physical and emotional, remain a reminder of her struggles, yet Asher’s acceptance and her mother’s unwavering support hint at

the possibility of healing. The chapter captures Lily’s complex emotions—longing, doubt, and tentative hope—as she navigates her relationships and her own identity.

Olivia 2

Olivia rushes to the Adams police station after receiving a panicked call from her son, Asher, who is being questioned. The chapter opens with her frantic arrival, noting her lack of preparation in her haste. She explains her relationship to Asher to the officer at the front desk, emphasizing her fear and confusion. The scene shifts as Lieutenant Mike Newcomb, an old acquaintance from Olivia’s past, intervenes to guide her inside. The tension builds as Olivia learns that Asher was found holding Lily’s body, though Mike reassures her that the blood on Asher’s clothes isn’t his.

Inside the station, Olivia is reunited with Asher, who is visibly distraught and covered in blood. The emotional weight of the moment is palpable as Olivia embraces him, trying to shield him from the unfolding tragedy. Mike’s warning—"It’s not his blood"—hints at the gravity of the situation. The chapter then transitions to Asher’s interrogation, where he recounts discovering Lily at the bottom of the stairs, unresponsive and bleeding. His confusion and desperation are evident as he struggles to articulate what happened.

Asher explains that he went to Lily’s house after she failed to respond to his texts, finding the door open and Lily already injured. His account is fragmented, filled with uncertainty and shock. Mike presses him for details, particularly why he didn’t call 911 immediately, which Asher seems unable to answer coherently. Olivia interjects, defending her son’s state of mind, but Mike insists on proceeding with the questioning. The chapter captures Asher’s growing distress as he grapples with the reality of Lily’s condition.

The chapter closes with Asher’s unresolved anguish and Olivia’s protective instincts clashing with the need for answers. The narrative leaves lingering questions about Lily’s fate and Asher’s involvement, setting the stage for further investigation. The emotional intensity of the scene underscores the fragility of the characters’

relationships and the looming uncertainty of what truly happened to Lily.

Lily 2

The chapter opens with Lily and Asher sharing an intimate moment in a tree house, laughing and reveling in their connection. The tree house, built by Asher’s grandfather, is filled with nostalgic remnants of childhood—books, games, and initials carved into the rafters. The setting evokes a sense of timelessness, as Lily imagines past visitors and marvels at the structure’s charm. Their playful banter and physical closeness highlight the depth of their relationship, with Lily feeling euphoric and anchored by Asher’s presence.

As they lie together, Asher reveals the tree house’s history, explaining its significance to his family and childhood. He shares anecdotes about his sister, Maya, and their imaginative games, as well as later memories of sneaking friends like Dirk up to smoke. The tree house, nicknamed "The Stronghold" or "The Throne Room," serves as a symbol of continuity across generations. Lily is drawn into Asher’s world, appreciating the layers of personal history embedded in the space. Their conversation shifts between humor and tenderness, underscoring their emotional bond.

The chapter’s tone becomes more sensual as Lily and Asher reconnect physically, their intimacy portrayed with poetic imagery. Lily reflects on the transformative power of their relationship, feeling complete in Asher’s arms. The tree house, with its rustic details and nostalgic artifacts, becomes a backdrop for their deepening connection. A moment of quiet reflection follows, with Lily quoting a French phrase about the cyclical nature of life, further emphasizing the theme of continuity.

The chapter takes a subtle turn when Lily notices the initials "B.F." and asks about Asher’s father, Braden Fields. Asher’s reaction is guarded, hinting at unresolved family tensions. This brief exchange contrasts with the earlier warmth, introducing a note of complexity to their relationship. The chapter ends on an ambiguous note, leaving readers curious about the significance of Asher’s father and how his past might

influence their future. The tree house, once a place of joy, now also holds echoes of unspoken stories.

Olivia 3

The chapter opens with Olivia trapped in a nightmare where she hides from her husband Braden, who aggressively accuses her of infidelity and abandonment. Despite her reassurances, Braden's paranoia escalates as he bangs on the door, claiming her absence proves her disloyalty. Olivia questions whether her decision to stay overnight at her parents' house was subconsciously motivated by fear of returning home to his outbursts. The tension peaks when Braden collapses emotionally, blaming his behavior on his overwhelming love for her, leaving Olivia physically comforting him while internally unsettled.

Olivia abruptly wakes to the sound of knocking at her door in the middle of the night. To her shock, Detective Mike and two officers stand outside, presenting an arrest warrant for her son, Asher, for the murder of Lily Campanello. Asher, disoriented and barely awake, is read his rights as Olivia desperately tries to intervene, insisting there's been a mistake. The officers ignore her protests, handcuffing Asher and confiscating his phone and laptop as evidence. Olivia's attempts to reason with Mike are dismissed, leaving her powerless as the situation spirals out of control.

Asher cooperates meekly, claiming he has nothing to hide, while Olivia frantically tries to protect him. In a poignant moment, she kneels to tie his shoes, a gesture reminiscent of his childhood, underscoring her maternal helplessness. The officers lead Asher to a police car, his lack of a coat symbolizing his vulnerability. Olivia's internal turmoil is palpable as she watches her son being driven away, her mind flashing back to Mike's past advice about the "front seat" of a police car—a stark contrast to Asher's current predicament.

The chapter ends with Mike instructing Olivia to stay behind, denying her the chance to follow Asher to the station. Her desperation mounts as she realizes the gravity of the situation: her son is being taken into custody for murder, and she is left with no

immediate recourse. The scene underscores the themes of maternal fear, systemic injustice, and the haunting echoes of past relationships colliding with present crises. Olivia’s nightmare and reality blur, leaving her trapped in a waking horror.

Lily 3

The chapter opens with Lily reflecting on the metaphor of "falling in love," comparing it to the precarious moments of a roller coaster ride or a misstep on a ladder. She emphasizes the lack of a soft landing, suggesting that love often leads to heartbreak. This sets the tone for her current emotional turmoil, as she grapples with the aftermath of revealing a painful secret to her boyfriend, Asher, who has since distanced himself from her. The imagery of falling underscores her vulnerability and regret.

Ten days have passed since Lily confided in Asher, and his silence has left her feeling isolated and rejected. She notes how he avoids her at school, surrounded by others to prevent any direct interaction. Lily acknowledges her mistake in trusting him with her past, a part of herself she still feels ashamed of. She had hoped Asher would see her for who she is now, but his reaction has shattered that expectation, leaving her to question her judgment and their relationship.

Despite the tension, Lily observes that Asher has kept her secret, which offers her a glimmer of hope. She struggles with the void his absence has created in her daily life, even as her friend Maya speculates about their relationship. Lily clings to the fact that Asher hasn’t officially ended things, though his avoidance speaks volumes. Her internal conflict is palpable as she balances despair with the faint possibility of reconciliation.

The chapter concludes with Lily visiting Asher’s house unannounced, only to find his mother, Olivia, working in the cellar. The casual interaction suggests Asher hasn’t shared their rift with his family, leaving Lily uncertain about her next steps. The scene underscores her desperation to reconnect with Asher, even as she grapples with the reality of their strained relationship. The chapter ends on a note of unresolved tension, mirroring Lily’s emotional limbo.

Olivia 4

The chapter opens with Olivia reflecting on how quickly abnormal situations become normalized in her life, from grieving her father's death to adjusting to visiting her son Asher in jail. She describes the stark contrast between visiting Asher with his attorney, Jordan, where they discuss legal strategies in private, and visiting alone, where she must communicate through Plexiglas in a crowded room. During their personal visits, they avoid discussing the case, instead focusing on mundane topics like sports and Asher's sketches, which include a poignant drawing of Lily. Olivia's heartbreak deepens as Asher repeatedly asks when he will be released—until the day he stops asking altogether.

On Saturdays, Olivia sells honey and beeswax products at the local farmers' market, but her business suffers due to the community's judgment. A January thaw brings more foot traffic, but customers avoid her booth, and vendors treat her with hesitation. Overhearing two girls gossip about Asher's incarceration, Olivia snaps, chastising them for their ignorance of the legal system and their cruel assumptions. Her outburst leaves her feeling ashamed but also furious at the town's collective condemnation. By the end of the market, it’s clear she’s been ostracized, and her unsold products are later vandalized, with her truck tires slashed.

Detective Mike Newcomb arrives to take Olivia's statement about the vandalism, their conversation strained by the unresolved tension between them. When Selena, Jordan's wife, arrives to give Olivia a ride, Mike offers to drive her home instead, hinting at lingering guilt or unresolved feelings. The chapter underscores Olivia's isolation as she navigates the fallout from Asher's arrest, facing both personal grief and public scorn.

Throughout the chapter, Olivia's resilience is tested as she balances her love for Asher with the harsh reality of his incarceration and the community's rejection. Her attempts to maintain normalcy—through visits, letters, and her market stall—are met with

hostility, leaving her emotionally raw. The destruction of her honey symbolizes the shattered remnants of her former life, while the strained interactions with Mike and Selena highlight the complexities of her support system. The chapter paints a vivid portrait of a mother's unwavering loyalty in the face of systemic and social adversity.

Lily 4

The chapter opens with Lily and Maya practicing fencing at Adams High, four weeks before a pivotal event. Lily is emotionally drained after a week of no communication with Asher, who abruptly walked out on her. Despite her desire to retreat into sadness, she agrees to teach Maya a flèche attack. As Lily demonstrates the move, her instructions take on an emotional intensity, likening the aggressive fencing technique to confronting life's injustices. Her outburst culminates in a physical collapse, leaving Maya concerned and prompting Lily to break down in tears.

Lily reflects on her paradoxical self-perception as a fundamentally happy person despite her struggles with depression. She distinguishes between clinical depression and the profound sadness stemming from life's hardships. The weight of her past feels like an anchor dragging her down, even as she glimpses a brighter future. This introspection reveals her inner turmoil, contrasting her outward resilience with the emotional scars she carries.

Maya comforts Lily on the gym floor, urging her to share what's troubling her. Lily hesitates, fearing the vulnerability of revisiting her pain. Maya's calm demeanor and perceptive questions hint at her own resilience, shaped by her identity as an Asian girl with two mothers in a predominantly white, straight community. The conversation shifts to Asher, with Lily confessing their week-long silence and the intensity of their unresolved conflict. Maya probes whether Lily's declaration of love triggered Asher's withdrawal, given his history of ending relationships when emotions deepen.

Maya speculates that Asher's fear of commitment may stem from his parents' failed marriage, suggesting he associates love with eventual disaster. Lily reveals that Asher had reciprocated her love declarations multiple times, making his sudden distance even more confusing. Maya's surprise at this revelation underscores the unusual nature of Asher's behavior, leaving both girls grappling with unanswered questions.

The chapter ends on a note of unresolved tension, highlighting Lily’s emotional vulnerability and the complexity of her relationship with Asher.

Olivia 5

The chapter opens with Olivia preparing her beehives for her impending absence due to Asher’s trial. May is a busy time for beekeepers, and she spends the day tending to her colonies, including those at an organic orchard. She observes the intricate workings of the hive, comparing it to a bustling city where each bee has a role. Olivia adds extra space for honey storage, reflecting on the labor-intensive process of nectar collection and the remarkable efficiency of worker bees, which can carry half their body weight in nectar. The hive’s collective decision-making, exemplified by the waggle dance, serves as a metaphor for the democratic process she hopes the jury will emulate.

Asher’s trial begins the next morning, and Olivia notices his healed wrist, now concealed by a watch that once belonged to her father. This detail prompts her to reflect on how both Asher and Lily used accessories to hide their scars, perhaps to shield themselves from painful memories. Olivia recalls her own past use of clothing to conceal bruises, drawing a parallel to Asher’s current struggle. The tension is palpable as Jordan, Asher’s lawyer, advises him to remain silent and composed during the trial, warning of the adversarial nature of the process. Despite Jordan’s attempts to reassure him, Asher is visibly anxious.

The arrival at the courthouse is chaotic, with media swarming Asher and hurling accusatory questions. Olivia and Jordan shield him as they push through the crowd, emphasizing the invasive scrutiny surrounding the case. Inside the courtroom, Jordan continues to coach Asher, stressing the importance of maintaining a neutral demeanor and using written notes to communicate. Olivia positions herself to observe Asher’s reactions, while Gina Jewett, the prosecutor, prepares her case. The scene underscores the high stakes and emotional toll of the trial.

The chapter juxtaposes the ordered, collaborative world of the beehive with the tumultuous human drama of the trial. Olivia’s reflections on the bees’ collective wisdom contrast sharply with the divisive and aggressive nature of the legal proceedings. Her hope for a fair and reasoned outcome mirrors the hive’s democratic decision-making, but the chapter ends on an uncertain note, leaving the reader to wonder whether the jury will rise to the challenge or succumb to the same chaos that surrounds the trial’s outset.

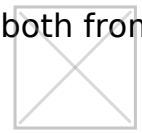
Lily 5

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.



Olivia 6

The chapter opens in a tense courtroom scene where chaos erupts after a shocking revelation. Olivia observes Asher, the defendant, who appears to be praying or begging for forgiveness as the judge struggles to restore order. The attorneys, Jordan McAfee and Gina Jewett, are visibly shaken, with Jordan reserving the right to recall the witness. The judge dismisses the court early, admonishing the jury to avoid media influence. Olivia remains seated, dreading the media frenzy outside, while Asher stares blankly, seemingly overwhelmed by the turn of events.

Jordan leads Olivia and Asher through a side exit to avoid the press, taking refuge in a conference room. He frantically reviews the autopsy report, realizing a critical detail was overlooked: Lily, the victim, was transgender. Jordan explains how this revelation gives the prosecution a motive—trans panic—which could severely damage Asher's defense. He warns Asher not to disclose whether he knew about Lily's identity, as ignorance is their only defense. Asher collapses onto the table, drained of energy, while Olivia grapples with her own suspicions about his reaction.

Later, Olivia encounters Ava Campanello, Lily's mother, in the courthouse bathroom. Ava is gaunt and avoids eye contact, her grief palpable. Olivia is struck by the contrast between their losses—Ava mourning Lily, while Olivia fears losing Asher. She wonders if she would similarly seek vengeance if their roles were reversed. The encounter leaves Olivia emotionally paralyzed, torn between empathy for Ava and her loyalty to Asher.

The chapter underscores the escalating stakes of the trial, with the new evidence threatening to sway the jury against Asher. Olivia's internal conflict mirrors the broader themes of perception and bias, as Jordan scrambles to adapt their strategy. The tension between truth and legal tactics is laid bare, leaving Olivia—and the reader—questioning what Asher truly knew and whether justice can be served amidst

such complexity.

Lily 6

The chapter opens with Lily startled by screams, only to discover her mother watching a video of two lynxes fighting in the forest. Her mother, a wildlife enthusiast, explains the animals' behavior as "pent-up kitten energy" and proudly shares that she filmed the encounter. Lily, preparing for a date with Asher, notes her mother's pointed comment about his frequent visits, hinting at their growing closeness. As she leaves, the sounds of the wildcats' screams linger, mirroring the intensity of her own emotions.

Asher arrives, displaying his usual attentiveness, opening the car door for Lily and showing a newfound sensitivity to her needs. Their relationship has deepened since his possessive outburst weeks earlier, and he seems determined to prove his growth. However, during their drive, Asher appears unsettled, eventually revealing he has a secret: he secretly visits his estranged father in Massachusetts. This monthly meeting, hidden from his mother, stems from a desire to fill an emotional void left since childhood.

Asher explains that he reconnected with his father a year ago after years of estrangement, driven by curiosity rather than forgiveness. He describes their meetings at a Chili’s restaurant, emphasizing his father’s eagerness to meet Lily. The revelation underscores Asher’s vulnerability and trust in her, as he shares details about their relationship, including how he told his father he loves her. Lily is deeply moved, her affection for Asher overwhelming her ability to respond verbally.

The chapter closes with Lily physically expressing her emotions, leaning against Asher as they drive. Her internal monologue reveals her own secrets—unshared truths she keeps guarded—while she marvels at Asher’s openness. The moment captures the asymmetry in their vulnerability: Lily is falling deeply for him but remains unwilling to reciprocate with her own confessions. The journey to meet his father marks a pivotal step in their relationship, blending intimacy with unspoken reservations.

Olivia 7

Olivia wakes from a vivid nightmare in which Asher, wearing her late father’s suit with his mouth sewn shut, tries to communicate with her. He presents a yellow index card listing three names—her father, Lily, and Asher—with the first two crossed out. Disturbed, Olivia rises before dawn, her anxiety heightened by the recent courtroom revelations. As she prepares coffee and steps outside to fetch the newspaper, she discovers the word "murderer" scrawled in red paint on her barn, a stark accusation tied to Asher’s ongoing trial. The teakettle’s whistle inside mirrors her inner turmoil.

Detective Mike Newcomb arrives to investigate the vandalism, though he admits the chances of catching the perpetrator are slim. Olivia senses his discomfort, a tension stemming from his role in testifying against Asher. Despite his apology for the situation, Olivia resents his involvement in the trial, even as she acknowledges his professional duty. Their interaction underscores her isolation and the weight of public judgment. Meanwhile, her internal conflict grows—is she protecting Asher or convincing herself he’s innocent?

Olivia’s partner, Jordan, is furious she called the police without consulting him, arguing that the vandalism is inevitable given the public’s perception of Asher’s guilt. Their heated exchange reveals Jordan’s frustration at his inability to shield Olivia and Asher from the town’s scorn. Olivia insists on asserting control over her property, but Jordan warns that legal acquittal won’t erase the stigma. Their argument highlights the emotional toll of the trial and the divide between Olivia’s defiance and Jordan’s pragmatism.

The chapter captures Olivia’s escalating distress as the trial’s fallout invades her personal life. The vandalism symbolizes the community’s condemnation, forcing her to confront the limits of her protection. Her interactions with Mike and Jordan reflect the broader themes of justice, loyalty, and the inescapable court of public opinion. The

chapter ends with Olivia grappling with her role in Asher’s defense and the realization that innocence in law may not translate to innocence in the eyes of others.

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.

Olivia 8

The chapter opens with the introduction of Dr. Monica Powers, a confident and accomplished gender confirmation surgeon, who takes the witness stand in a courtroom. Her striking presence and expertise immediately command attention, challenging preconceived notions about transgender individuals. Dr. Powers explains her work, including her pro bono efforts to reverse genital mutilation, and reveals her identity as a trans woman. The jury’s reactions range from curiosity to surprise, highlighting the societal biases she aims to dismantle through her testimony.

Dr. Powers provides a detailed explanation of what it means to be transgender, distinguishing between sex (biological attributes) and gender (psychological identity). She describes how transgender individuals often feel a disconnect between their assigned gender at birth and their true selves, using the analogy of handedness to illustrate the innate nature of gender identity. Her testimony emphasizes that being transgender is not a choice but an inherent aspect of a person’s identity, and she introduces terms like "nonbinary" and "genderqueer" to describe the spectrum of gender experiences.

The discussion shifts to the challenges faced by transgender individuals, including stigma, discrimination, and violence. Dr. Powers cites alarming statistics about the murders of trans people, underscoring the dangers they encounter simply for living authentically. Her testimony subtly aligns with the prosecution’s argument, as she highlights the societal pressures and threats that could contribute to a volatile situation. The protagonist, Olivia, reflects on the exhaustion Elizabeth, a trans character, must feel from constantly defending her existence.

The chapter concludes with Jordan McAfee’s strategic questioning, which aims to educate the jury while advancing his case. Despite objections from the prosecution, the judge allows the testimony, recognizing its broader relevance. Dr. Powers’

explanations challenge the jury’s assumptions, forcing them to reconsider their views on gender and identity. The scene sets the stage for deeper exploration of the themes of prejudice, identity, and the intersection of personal and legal battles in the narrative.

Lily 8

The chapter opens with Lily, a transgender student, observing the dynamics in the girls' locker room at Adams High. She contrasts the modest, self-conscious behavior of most girls with the confident display of Mackenzie LaVerdiere and her friends, who admire Mackenzie's new tattoo. Lily reflects on her unique perspective as a trans person, noting the envy and insecurity she observes in others, both in the locker room and her past experiences in men's spaces. The scene highlights themes of body image, gender identity, and the social hierarchies among teenagers.

Later, Lily walks through town, contemplating her gratitude for her trans identity, despite past struggles with self-acceptance. She recalls moments of despair, mirroring the self-loathing she overheard from a classmate in the locker room. Sitting by the river, she reads William Blake's "The Sick Rose," which moves her to tears. The poem's themes of hidden corruption and destructive love resonate deeply with her, especially after a classroom discussion where her teacher, Chopper, challenges students to explore their emotional responses to the text.

The chapter also delves into Lily's school environment, where Chopper's unconventional teaching methods foster introspection. A student's crude interpretation of the poem leads to his dismissal, while another student's poignant observation about love causing harm sparks a reflective silence. Chopper's wisdom about the cyclical nature of heartbreak and healing leaves a lasting impression on Lily, underscoring the chapter's exploration of vulnerability and resilience.

Finally, the chapter touches on the Rainbow Alliance, an LGBTQ student group at Adams High, during a Morning Meeting presentation. Finn and Caeden, the group's leaders, introduce their initiatives for the year, emphasizing inclusivity. This segment reinforces the chapter's focus on identity and community, as Lily navigates her place in a world that is both affirming and challenging for trans individuals. The chapter ends

on a note of connection, hinting at the ongoing journey of self-discovery and belonging.

Olivia 9

The chapter opens with Olivia’s tense courtroom testimony, which fails to convincingly support her son Asher’s innocence. Her lawyer, Jordan, is furious, accusing her of undermining the defense by revealing unnecessary details about her past relationship with Braden. Olivia admits to withholding information, but Jordan’s anger escalates as he blames her for damaging the case. The situation worsens when Asher, visibly distressed, interrupts to demand he be allowed to testify, believing the jury needs to hear his side of the story directly. Jordan vehemently opposes this, warning it could backfire, but Asher insists, threatening to fire Jordan if he refuses.

Asher’s frustration extends to Olivia, whom he accuses of not trusting him, comparing her skepticism to her past treatment of his father. He coldly excludes her from further legal discussions, leaving her stunned in the hallway. The scene highlights the fractured relationship between mother and son, with Asher’s outburst revealing his deep resentment. Olivia reflects on the painful parallel between Asher’s words and those once spoken by Braden, underscoring her guilt and fear that history is repeating itself. The emotional confrontation leaves Olivia isolated, grappling with her mistakes and Asher’s rejection.

When court resumes, Jordan formally notifies the judge that Asher will testify against legal advice, emphasizing his client’s insistence. The judge confirms Asher’s decision, and the jury watches curiously as he takes the stand. Olivia, though excluded, silently prays for his protection, a rare moment of vulnerability. Jordan begins Asher’s testimony by asking about his relationship with Lily, the deceased. Asher’s demeanor softens as he describes her, hinting at genuine affection, but the tension remains high as the court prepares to hear his account—a risky move that could either salvage or sink his defense.

The chapter captures the high-stakes drama of the trial, focusing on the clash between legal strategy and personal conviction. Asher’s defiance and Olivia’s helplessness underscore the emotional toll of the case. Jordan’s professional frustration contrasts with Asher’s desperate need to reclaim his narrative, while Olivia’s exclusion marks a low point in her relationship with her son. The chapter sets the stage for Asher’s testimony, leaving readers uncertain whether his gamble will redeem him or seal his fate.

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.

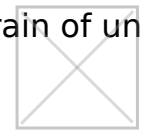
Olivia 10

The chapter "Olivia 10" from *Mad Honey* captures the tense atmosphere of waiting for a jury verdict five months after a pivotal event. Olivia reflects on her past marriage to Braden, comparing the agony of waiting for a loved one’s surgery to the current uncertainty of the trial. She grapples with the emotional toll of the delay, describing how time seems to stretch endlessly as the group—including her son Asher, her brother Jordan, his wife Selena, and their son Sam—remains confined to a courthouse conference room. The mundane activities, like reading newspapers or *The Lord of the Rings*, contrast sharply with the underlying anxiety, highlighting the strain of anticipation.

Olivia’s interactions with her nephew Sam reveal layers of familial dynamics and nostalgia. Their conversation about *The Lord of the Rings* sparks memories of Braden, who loved the book and used to read it aloud during car rides. This moment underscores Olivia’s unresolved feelings about her ex-husband and her awareness of how family traditions shape perspectives. Sam’s innocent question about her favorite book exposes the imbalance in her past relationship, where Braden’s preferences often dominated. The exchange also hints at Olivia’s protective concern for Sam, fearing the loss of his youthful optimism in the face of life’s harsh realities.

As the day drags on without a verdict, tensions rise among the group. Jordan and Olivia bicker like children, their frustration manifesting in petty annoyances. The confined space amplifies their stress, and Asher’s outburst forces them to confront the possibility of an unfavorable outcome. His raw fear—voicing the unthinkable—breaks through their defensive optimism, revealing the vulnerability beneath their stoic facades. The chapter’s tone shifts from restless waiting to a palpable dread, emphasizing the emotional weight of the trial’s uncertainty.

The chapter closes with the jury’s announcement that they will recess for the night, prolonging the agony. Olivia’s internal monologue reflects on the parallels between her past and present struggles, particularly the theme of waiting and the toll it takes. The snapshot-like structure of the narrative—divided into Tuesday and Wednesday—mirrors the fragmented, exhausting nature of the experience. Through Olivia’s perspective, the chapter explores themes of familial bonds, resilience, and the psychological strain of unresolved justice, leaving readers with a sense of impending reckoning.



Lily 10

The chapter opens with Lily and her mother settling into their new home in Adams, New Hampshire, after a cross-country move from California. Their journey was filled with bonding moments, like sleeping under the stars in Wyoming and staying in budget motels. Upon arrival, they camped in the empty house, drinking wine and listening to the sounds of their new surroundings. Lily feels hopeful about starting fresh, but the next morning, the moving van arrives, and a worker named Hurley greets her with an unwelcome comment, hinting at challenges ahead.

As they unpack, Lily’s mother joyfully rediscovers framed photos and art, treating them like cherished gifts. Lily stumbles upon an old photo album filled with pretransition memories, including images of herself as a child in a suit, playing T-ball, and wearing her mother’s lipstick. Her mother, emotional, admits she couldn’t bring herself to discard these photos, explaining that they represent a part of her own history too. Lily, surprisingly unbothered, reassures her mother that it’s okay to keep them, acknowledging that her mother also underwent a transition of her own.

The chapter delves into Lily’s reflections on her childhood, recalling how her mother supported her femininity at home despite her father’s disapproval. A poignant memory surfaces of Lily dressing as a fairy queen, which sparked tension between her parents. This moment underscores the familial conflict surrounding Lily’s identity and her mother’s protective role. Lily now recognizes her mother’s fragility, realizing that their shared journey has shaped them both in profound ways.

The chapter closes with Lily and her mother sitting together, flipping through the album, as Lily comforts her tearful mother. In a role reversal, Lily becomes the caretaker, imagining a future where she tends to her aging mother. The scene highlights their deep bond and the mutual resilience they’ve developed. The chapter captures themes of identity, memory, and the enduring love between mother and

daughter, set against the backdrop of a fresh start in a new home.

Olivia 11

The chapter "Olivia 11" from *Mad Honey* explores Asher's struggle to reintegrate into life after being acquitted in a murder trial. Despite his legal innocence, he faces social stigma, with people treating him as a curiosity or even a pariah. His attempt to reconnect with his hockey teammates ends in a fight after being called a derogatory term, highlighting the alienation he feels. Even his friendship with Dirk becomes strained, as their conversations reveal how far apart their lives have grown. Asher and his mother, Olivia, settle into a quiet routine of beekeeping, cooking, and watching movies, clinging to small comforts in their fractured world.

Maya, Asher's best friend, reappears after weeks of silence, explaining her absence was due to her mothers' concerns about her college prospects. She reveals she wrote her college essay about Lily, the victim in Asher's trial, which Olivia finds distasteful. Maya expresses guilt over the trial's outcome and insists she wanted to support Asher, but her presence stirs unresolved tensions. When she mentions a text Lily sent Asher—one he never received—Olivia becomes suspicious. This revelation hints at withheld information that could have altered the trial's course, leaving Olivia questioning Maya's role in the events.

The narrative shifts to Maya's perspective, revealing her internal conflict as Asher's best friend. She notices his emotional decline and his obsessive checking of his phone for messages from Lily. Though she has unrequited feelings for Asher, she accepts their platonic relationship. Her loyalty is tested as she grapples with how to help him while navigating her own guilt and the fallout from the trial. The chapter underscores the complexity of their bond, strained by grief, secrets, and unspoken truths.

The chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension, as Maya's accidental admission about the text raises new questions about Lily's death and the trial's fairness. Olivia's suspicion grows, suggesting that the truth may be more complicated than the legal

system acknowledged. The emotional weight of the chapter lies in the characters' attempts to move forward while being haunted by the past, illustrating how trauma reshapes relationships and identities. The quiet moments between Asher and Olivia contrast with the underlying unease, leaving readers anticipating further revelations.

Epilogue

The epilogue of *Mad Honey* reflects on the resilience of bees as a metaphor for survival, despite their biological contradictions. Worker bees, though sterile and prone to self-destruction when stinging, thrive due to group selection—prioritizing the collective over individual reproduction. The narrator, preparing hives for winter, draws parallels between the bees' endurance and human perseverance, setting the stage for an unexpected encounter with Ava Campanello, the mother of Asher's late girlfriend, Lily.

Ava arrives unannounced, her car packed for a permanent departure. The tension between them is palpable, marked by unspoken grief and unresolved history. Ava admits she doesn’t know why she’s there but reveals her plan to hike the Appalachian Trail with her dog, Boris, seeking escape from her unbearable loss. The narrator’s attempt to apologize is met with Ava’s raw honesty about the isolating nature of grief, as others gradually move on while her pain remains.

Their conversation shifts to Asher, now at Plymouth State, and Ava surprises the narrator by expressing relief that the narrator didn’t lose a child. She reveals her own compounded grief—having once lost a son and then gaining a daughter (Lily), only to lose her too. The narrator, struck by Ava’s vulnerability, offers a jar of honey as a symbolic gesture of enduring memory, despite Ava’s admitted dislike for it. The honey, immortal and unchanging, becomes a metaphor for the persistence of love and loss.

The chapter closes with Ava driving away, the jar of honey left as a silent promise. The narrator imagines a future where Ava might one day rediscover the honey, long after the pain has dulled, and find solace in its timelessness. The epilogue underscores themes of survival, the enduring nature of grief, and the small, unexpected connections that bridge divides between people shaped by shared tragedy.