

# Breastmilk

The chapter opens with the protagonist's raw and conflicted emotions after childbirth as she holds her newborn son for the first time. She describes the baby as a "warm, slimy creature," reflecting her detachment, while hospital staff interact with her in a patronizing manner. Her husband, Timi, attempts to participate but is sidelined by the traditional hospital protocols, mirroring the protagonist's own unspoken tensions in their marriage. The physical exhaustion of labor contrasts with her observational focus on Timi's tearful pride as he holds their swaddled child, though she deliberately turns away from this emotional moment.

The narrative shifts to the protagonist's mother visiting the next morning, brimming with pride and questions about the birth. Their strained dynamic emerges as the mother dominates conversations while the protagonist, physically drained, resists engagement. A discussion about a postponed conference reveals the mother's priorities—her activist work on chemosensory research—while highlighting the protagonist's lingering concerns about being overshadowed. The mother's performative care contrasts with the daughter's desire for autonomy, a tension exacerbated when a nurse arrives to check lactation progress.

A confrontation unfolds as the nurse insists on examining the protagonist's breasts despite her insistence that no milk has come in. The protagonist's sharp resistance—grabbing the nurse's wrist—and her mother's correction of the nurse's use of "Mrs." underscore their shared defiance of societal expectations. This scene amplifies the protagonist's bodily autonomy struggles, linking her inability to lactate with deeper anxieties about failed maternal norms and unresolved marital betrayal, as hinted by her fixation on the nurse's resemblance to someone from Timi's past.

The chapter closes with preparations for discharge, where physical touch becomes a metaphor for trust issues. Timi's dry palms remind the protagonist of his past affair,

casting doubt on her performative forgiveness. As she holds her unnamed son, the doctor's reassurances about delayed lactation go unheard, symbolizing her unspoken fears of inadequacy. The fragmented ending leaves her emotional state unresolved, suspended between societal pressures of motherhood and the weight of unprocessed betrayal.