

Chapter 13

The chapter delves into the protagonist's emotional turmoil and strained relationship with her partner, Harris. She struggles to conceal her inner chaos, particularly her unresolved feelings for someone named Davey, while maintaining a facade of normalcy. Harris senses her distress, mistaking it for post-travel fatigue, but the protagonist deflects with a lie about menopause to avoid confrontation. This deception temporarily garners sympathy, creating a fragile moment of connection, though the underlying tension remains unresolved. The protagonist's internal conflict is palpable as she oscillates between guilt and relief, using distractions like cleaning and a rubber band habit to cope.

A pivotal scene unfolds during a walk to the dog park, where the protagonist attempts to appear wholesome for their child, Sam. She forces herself to engage with dogs and suppress thoughts of Davey, snapping the rubber band as a physical reminder to stay present. The outing takes an ironic turn when Sam discovers a chair labeled "Call me"—the same chair the protagonist's lover used to climb into her window. Harris's oblivious suggestion to take the chair home adds dark humor, highlighting the protagonist's fear of exposure. Her internal panic contrasts sharply with Harris's innocent enthusiasm, underscoring the fragility of her lies.

The chapter explores themes of deception and emotional labor, as the protagonist navigates her dual reality. Her lies—first about menopause, then about the chair—reveal her desperation to maintain control while avoiding vulnerability. Harris's attempts to understand and support her are met with deflection, illustrating the growing disconnect in their relationship. The protagonist's coping mechanisms, from compulsive cleaning to self-harm via the rubber band, reflect her escalating distress. Yet, these actions also provide a temporary sense of order amid her emotional chaos.

In the final moments, the protagonist's routine of alternating the rubber band between wrists symbolizes her futile pursuit of balance. Her obsessive cleaning and masturbation serve as distractions from her unresolved grief and guilt. The chapter ends on a note of uneasy stasis, with the protagonist clinging to rituals that neither heal nor conceal her pain. The narrative captures the dissonance between outward appearances and inner turmoil, leaving readers questioning how long her carefully constructed facade can hold.