

Chapter 26

The chapter opens with a breakfast conversation where Sam mentions a gymnastics classmate sharing the name of Papa's best friend, prompting the narrator to realize it's time to explain their unconventional family structure to their child. The couple meticulously prepares a script to navigate this delicate conversation, aiming to balance honesty with reassurance. Their dialogue reveals underlying anxieties about phrasing and the potential long-term implications of their words, reflecting both their care and the complexity of redefining familial relationships post-romance. The scene underscores the tension between planning for emotional clarity and the unpredictability of such vulnerable moments.

During the preparation, the couple grapples with existential questions about their future, including the possibility of divorce. The narrator reflects on how the concept of divorce has shifted from feeling emotionally charged to a mundane administrative process. Their collaborative effort to memorize and refine the script highlights their shared commitment to transparency while exposing their fears of failure. The mundane yet poignant details—like using a Popsicle as a cue—add levity to the weighty emotional labor of renegotiating family dynamics in a way their child can understand.

A parallel narrative follows the narrator's visit to Dr. Mendoza, where she confronts anxieties about perimenopause and aging. The doctor reframes "freaking out" as a natural part of transitions, comparing it to the trauma of birth that prepares a baby for life. This metaphor resonates with the narrator, who begins to view her emotional turmoil as a necessary step toward a new phase. The clinical setting contrasts with the intimacy of the family conversation, yet both scenarios explore themes of change, acceptance, and the search for stability amid upheaval.

The chapter concludes with the narrator seeking positive perspectives on menopause by texting older women. Their responses—ranging from physical relief to newfound freedom and self-discovery—challenge her earlier fears. The rapid, varied replies paint a nuanced picture of post-reproductive life, emphasizing empowerment rather than decline. This collective wisdom, juxtaposed with the earlier familial and medical anxieties, weaves together the chapter's central theme: transformation, whether in relationships or the body, demands vulnerability but can lead to unexpected liberation.

