

A MAUDLIN LITTLE CHRISTMAS

Merry Bloody Christmas everyone! So glad you are here, has it already been a year? Time really flies, no? These words run through my brain, the one hidden behind perfectly applied Chanel cosmetics and under my head of glorious hair, styled by Sven at Vidal. I so dread this day of over-the-top artificial cheer, made artificially merrier by cocktails and sycophantic relatives. But alas, December the 25th is here again.

I don't need to be fully conscience first thing, as the morning starts with simply little Edward and his father. The three of us made a nice Christmas card photo. If you looked in the window you might be jealous of the scene. We all empty our stockings, taking the time to ooh and ahh over each present. I know what my presents are I stuffed my own stocking. Edward's excitement is enough to distract his father and I from our own malaise, although mine is the heaviest in the room. My morose mood is so deep, that I can smile and nod with a holiday expression born of the same science that makes it difficult to tell hot from cold. Edward and his father toss their oranges from the toes of their stockings back and forth, until I put an end to it with a worrying yet light "Boys, the lamps!" which stops them cold, as if they forgot I was even in the room.

It's irritating how I have spent hours wrapping presents for these two, that are opened in minutes. Boys have no sense of a perfectly tied bow, or how I got the reindeer to match up exactly at the seam of the package, or how I used invisible tape to make the gifts prettier. My own presents are irrelevant. We are both watching Edward. He and his miraculous gifts from Santa are our Christmas focus this morning.

My husband stood and headed over to the Christmas tree where he reached into the branches and pulled out a ring box. I barely had time to realize what it was, when it was suddenly in my hand. A lovely box in a lovely familiar blue. The bow was a little tired, but I opened it with enthusiasm fit for the occasion. I opened the box and found a lovely opal surrounded by diamonds.

"Do you like it dear?" he asked.

"Oh, I simply love it! It's perfect" I replied as I slid the ring on my finger. I had done this many times before, as I had found this ring the first week I lived in this house. Did he not think I would go through every drawer, closet and inch of this house when he was out? This bauble was obviously an heirloom of his dead wife's. He kept it buried in the back of his sock drawer, with a few other pieces of jewelry I could probably expect at Christmas' in the future.

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Maybe he thought our second Christmas as a family was far enough away from *her death* to bring her material legacy out of hiding. My throat thickened and I tried not to scream. I struggled to moderate my breath, and for a few seconds I mistook the sound of blood rushing in my ears for a rainstorm outside. It's not raining today, it's snowing. I focused my eyes on Edward and his new train set, feigning interest in his new caboose. I breathed deeply through my nose, trying not to gasp. This latest show of endearment from my husband was another clear indication of my role in replacing his dead wife down to the last detail.

He brought me a cup of coffee, black. I casually slipped into the kitchen to add cream, and joined my two boys as they rifled through the last of their presents.

It seemed like hours before the nanny came in the room to get Edward ready for the Christmas party that was going to start at two o'clock. I was looking forward to the distraction of other people and their own issues to overshadow mine. I sank into the background, behaving like a busy hostess moving from one guest to the other. People want to talk about themselves, and I relished the stories my guest told, insofar as it meant I needn't say anything meaningful beyond "Really?" or "That's so, so exciting!"

I managed to hold myself together, even when my sister-in-law admired my ring with a wisp of haughtiness, probably recognizing the piece from her dead sister-in-law. I doubt she had any idea that I knew rings provenance as well. I thanked her for noticing it and moved on to another guest, who needed a refill of champagne, which I facilitated by directing one of the maids running around with a bottle to his empty glass.

Dinner was served. My husband and his butler flitted around the room asking people to move to the dining room. This usually took a few minutes, which I used to run upstairs so that I could vomit and cry a bit. I made some faces at myself to get some kinks out of it, and skillfully reapplied my make-up where it had run from my mini hysterics. I wash my hands with steaming water and contemplate letting my new old ring go down the drain. It's a pleasant thought, but what if no one notices it's missing?

