

Het volgende fragment komt uit een roman geschreven door Marian Keyes. In dit fragment gaan Grace en haar vriend, Damien Stapleton, op kraambezoek bij zijn zus Christine.

This Charming Man

Christine, tall and elegant and astonishingly svelte for a woman who had given birth only five weeks ago, came to welcome us. 'Come in, come in. Sorry, I'm just in myself, it's all a bit ...' [...] 'Richard should be home soon.' Richard was Christine's husband. He had one of those mysterious jobs where he spent fourteen hours a day on the phone, making money. Damien and I joked privately that every day he was locked into his office and wasn't allowed to leave until he'd made another hundred million euro. ('Ninety-eight ... ninety-nine ... still ninety-nine ... ninety-nine – and a hundred! Well done, off you go home, Richard.')

We followed Christine into the enormous Colefax and Fowler kitchen, where a nervous-looking Polish girl was doing something at the microwave.

'This is Marta,' Christine said. 'Our new nanny.'

Marta nodded hello and promptly scarpered.

'And this ...' Christine gazed fondly into a bassinet, in which a tiny pink-skinned baby was asleep. '... is Maximillian.'

(Yes, Christine and Richard had named their four children after emperors. I know it makes them sound like grandiose nutters, but they're not.)

Damien and I stared politely at the sleeping child.

'Okay, you can stop admiring him now.' Christine reached for a corkscrew. 'Wine?'

'Yes. Can I do anything to help?'

It was a fake question. No one could ever help Christine. She did everything so much better and faster than everyone else that there was no point. Anyway, I didn't want to help. I was at someone's else's house for my dinner, why would I want to do stuff I'd have to do at home?

'All done,' Christine said. 'Did most of it last night. Just a few last-minute fiddly bits.'

'What's with your trouser suit?' I asked her. 'How come you're looking so clean? You're not back at work already?'

'Certainly not, I'm just popping in for a couple hours a day, to keep an eye on things.'

Christine was so clever and accomplished that she no longer did much actual scrubbed-up, green-gowned, hands-on surgery stuff. Instead she was Head of Surgery at Dublin's most expensive hospital, the first

woman to have ever held that post. (Or perhaps she was the youngest ever Head. It was hard to keep track because the Stapletons seemed to be always winning accolades. If, every time one of them got a promotion or won an award, we gave them the celebration they deserved, we'd all end up in the Priory.)

'So where's Augustina?' I looked around.

'At her Sanskrit lesson?' Damien asked.

'Haha. Mandarin, actually.'

It took me a moment to realize that Christine was serious.

'We don't make her go,' Christine said, as I tried to hide my astonishment – well, actually distress, if I'm to be honest. 'She *asked* to go to lessons.'

Too weird. What nine-year-old would *ask* to learn Mandarin?

'And we keep an eye on her,' Christine said.

'On her work-life balance?' Damien suggested.

'If your tongue could get any further into your cheek...' Christine said.

'Anyway, cheers.' She held up her glass. 'It's lovely to see you both.'