

Hannah: The Plus-One

The wedding reception unfolds in a dazzling blur of lights, laughter, and champagne flutes raised in celebration, yet for Hannah, a persistent unease shadows the joyous atmosphere. *The Plus-One* dynamic adds an unexpected weight to the evening—Will's speech, while polished and charming, carries an undertone she can't quite place, as if each carefully crafted word hides a deeper, unspoken truth. As she watches him speak, commanding the room with ease, Hannah feels disconnected, her thoughts straying to her husband, Charlie. Seated apart from her, immersed in his role among the wedding party, Charlie's absence feels more than physical—it's an emotional chasm that has quietly grown between them, widening with each passing day. The lively conversations at her table and the unrestrained laughter of the guests provide little comfort. Instead, the noise around her serves to amplify the dissonance within, making her feel like an outsider amidst the celebration.

The air shifts when Jonathan Briggs, or Johnno as he is better known, stands to deliver the best man's speech. There's an almost imperceptible hesitation in Charlie's voice as he introduces him, a brief pause that doesn't go unnoticed by Hannah. The room quiets, anticipation building, but not all of it is eager. Johnno's unsteady demeanor, betrayed by the slight slur in his words and the telltale flush of alcohol on his face, sets the tone for what's to come. What starts as a typical trip down memory lane quickly veers into treacherous territory, his jokes cutting too sharply, his anecdotes laced with a bitterness that the guests can't quite ignore. His words, meant to celebrate Will, instead seem to challenge him, painting a picture of their past that is far from the polished narrative Will has always projected. The tension in the room grows with every word, the laughter from earlier fading into uneasy murmurs as Johnno delves into stories that blur the line between humor and accusation.

The turning point comes when Johnno brings up the suit—a gesture long touted as a symbol of Will’s generosity and camaraderie. The narrative unravels as Johnno reveals the truth: the suit was no heartfelt gift but a calculated pretense, a prop in the facade of their friendship. The air in the room thickens as Johnno’s voice grows more pointed, each word a deliberate strike at the veneer of perfection Will has cultivated. The crowd shifts uncomfortably, torn between their loyalty to the groom and the uncomfortable truths being aired before them. Will’s composed smile tightens, his jaw clenching subtly, a clear sign to Hannah that the cracks in his armor are beginning to show. Yet, even as Johnno’s words dig deeper, Will maintains his carefully crafted facade, offering deflections and smooth responses that only partially mask the strain beneath.

Hannah’s gaze flickers between Will and Charlie, whose expression is unreadable as he watches the unfolding scene. The distance between them feels more pronounced now, her thoughts filled with questions she is too afraid to voice. What does Charlie make of this? Is he as uneasy as she is, or has he grown so accustomed to the unspoken complexities of their own relationship that this spectacle barely registers? Her attention returns to Johnno, who now speaks less like a best man and more like a man with unfinished business, his words no longer veiled in humor but tinged with raw emotion. The room is no longer filled with celebration but with a heavy, almost tangible tension, the kind that signals something significant has shifted, even if no one fully understands it yet.

As Johnno finally steps down, leaving behind an air of awkwardness and unresolved tension, Hannah feels a wave of discomfort settle over her. The reception continues—guests clinking glasses, music playing—but the earlier exuberance is noticeably dimmed. She can’t shake the feeling that this night, meant to symbolize love and unity, has instead become a stage for confrontation and revelation. Watching Will return to Jules, offering her a reassuring smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes, Hannah senses that the cracks in the facade of this perfect wedding are only the beginning. In the midst of the revelry, she finds herself grappling with her own reflections, not just about the spectacle unfolding before her but about the state of her own life. Weddings are meant to be a celebration of new beginnings, but tonight, they

feel like a reckoning—a moment when illusions fall away, leaving only the raw, uncomfortable truths behind.

