

Now: The wedding night

The rhythmic hum of *the wedding night* reception, a symphony of laughter, music, and clinking glasses, falters as an unexpected disturbance ripples through the marquee. The waitress, no longer an unnoticed part of the evening's meticulous choreography, now stands at the center of an unraveling moment. Her presence, trembling and visibly shaken, disrupts the illusion of seamless festivity, replacing the air of celebration with an unspoken dread. The conversations die down, leaving an eerie silence in their wake, stretching longer than anyone feels comfortable with. Her lips part slightly, but no words escape—only a series of shallow breaths and a vacant, haunted stare. Whatever she has witnessed outside has robbed her of the ability to articulate it, leaving her to stand in the dim candlelight as a mute testament to something gone terribly wrong.

A slow blink, deliberate and drawn out, is the only motion she makes, as if grounding herself back into reality. The wedding planner, who has spent the evening ensuring the event flows seamlessly, steps forward with practiced composure, though her voice betrays a subtle tremor. "What happened out there?" she asks, careful not to alarm the guests, though her own apprehension lingers just beneath the surface. She knows she needs an answer, but something inside her whispers that she may not want to hear it. The crowd leans in, curiosity mingling with a growing sense of unease, waiting for an explanation that will make sense of the fear etched across the waitress's pale face. Even the wind outside seems to pause, the canvas of the marquee barely shifting, as if the world itself is holding its breath.

The waitress swallows hard, her throat dry, before finally managing to speak—just two words, but they land like a weight upon the gathering. "He's dead." A hushed gasp ripples through the guests, shattering the fragile calm that had momentarily settled. For a heartbeat, no one moves, as if frozen by the sheer finality of the statement.

Then, like a crack in a dam giving way, the reaction surges forth—whispers escalating into sharp, frantic murmurs. "Who?" someone demands, their voice edged with urgency, slicing through the thickening air. "Who is dead?" But the waitress, her body drained of whatever strength had carried her this far, collapses to the floor, her breathing ragged, as though she has left something vital behind in the dark from which she emerged.

The celebration, once filled with warmth and indulgence, now teeters on the edge of hysteria. The sharp contrast between the opulence of the setting—the golden glow of chandeliers, the elegantly arranged tables, the polished sheen of fine silverware—and the cold reality of death unsettles everyone. The bride and groom, once the center of attention, now seem almost irrelevant, their night stolen by something far more sinister. Eyes that once admired the delicate floral arrangements and marveled at the grandeur of the event now dart anxiously across the room, scanning for signs, searching for reassurance that no further horrors await. It is a grotesque juxtaposition: the remnants of joy clashing with the creeping dread that something far worse may be lurking just beyond the marquee's fabric walls.

The wedding planner, acutely aware that she must maintain control, subtly signals for assistance, her mind racing through possible courses of action. But the whispers have already begun to spread, hushed yet urgent, speculation feeding upon itself as unease coils around the guests. The storm outside howls in the distance, a reminder of the island's isolation, reinforcing the growing realization that there is nowhere to run. Within the marquee, suspicion grows like a shadow cast too long by candlelight, stretching across faces both familiar and unfamiliar. The question of who is dead is now accompanied by another, far more unsettling: how did it happen?

This was supposed to be a night of love and celebration, a moment frozen in time for all the right reasons. Instead, it has become something else entirely, something chilling and unpredictable. The wedding, with all its carefully laid plans and promises of perfection, has collapsed under the weight of a mystery that no one was prepared for. Beneath the silk-draped ceilings and sparkling décor, a dark truth has arrived

uninvited, threatening to unravel the carefully crafted illusions of unity and joy. The night is no longer a celebration of marriage—it is the beginning of a story no one wanted to tell, one that will force secrets into the light and expose the cracks beneath the polished façade.

