

Hannah: The Plus-One

Hannah senses a growing unease as the evening progresses, particularly in the way Johnno and the other ushers behave when alcohol flows freely. Their old public school camaraderie carries an unsettling undercurrent, as if beneath their rowdy laughter and inside jokes, something darker lurks. The Plus-One dynamic adds to her discomfort, as she watches her husband, Charlie, becoming absorbed in the crowd, laughing too loudly, lingering too long near Jules, and displaying an energy that feels unfamiliar. Charlie is typically mild-mannered, but alcohol strips away his restraint, turning him into someone unpredictable, a version of himself that Hannah neither trusts nor likes. The sight of him, swept up in the energy of men who thrive on excess, leaves Hannah torn between anger and concern, unsure if she should intervene or step back and let him make his own mistakes.

Duncan, one of the ushers, makes a sharp remark, teasing Hannah about controlling Charlie, a comment laced with the kind of casual cruelty often disguised as humor. Instead of defending Hannah, Charlie, clearly embarrassed, chooses to align himself with the ushers, laughing it off and drinking more as if proving his allegiance. Hannah watches in silence, realizing that trying to pull Charlie away would only push him deeper into their influence. The decision is not hers to make—Charlie has chosen to engage, to drink, to step into their world of juvenile bravado, even at the cost of their relationship. A part of her wants to warn him, to tell him that he doesn't need their validation, but another part of her knows it would be useless. As he clinks glasses with them, already half-drunkenly absorbed in their antics, Hannah feels a sharp pang of detachment, as if the man she married has momentarily vanished.

The energy of the evening turns more chaotic as the ushers chant their old school motto, their voices rising in drunken unison. What might have once been a nostalgic call to youthful recklessness now takes on a more menacing tone, an intoxicating blend of arrogance and danger. The chant becomes a signal for escalating debauchery, their uninhibited behavior taking on a cult-like intensity that makes Hannah's skin crawl. The night descends further into games meant to test limits, one particularly vile challenge forcing the losers to drink a grotesque concoction, more humiliation than entertainment. The cruelty of it, masked as harmless fun, reinforces the toxic dynamic of the group, where brotherhood is built on shared degradation. Hannah watches, repulsed, her discomfort morphing into a silent resolve—she wants no part of this night, no part of this world that Charlie seems so eager to belong to.

Needing an escape, she quietly slips away to the drawing room, craving solitude, only to find Olivia already there. The tension of the evening lifts slightly as they fall into conversation, their interaction tinged with the ease of teenage rebellion, as if escaping the chaos outside has created an unspoken bond between them. For the first time that night, Hannah feels a sliver of relief, the warmth of human connection momentarily easing the sharp edges of her discontent. Their moment of camaraderie is short-lived, however, as Angus, stumbling and slurring, crashes into the room, a reminder that the madness outside is still unfolding. The disruption shatters their temporary refuge, pulling them back into the reality of the night's unraveling.

The chapter captures the discomfort of watching a loved one change under the influence of peer pressure and alcohol, the conflict between intervention and self-preservation. Hannah and Olivia's quiet moment in the drawing room offers a brief reprieve, a stark contrast to the chaos that defines the rest of the evening. Yet even in that solace, the night's tension lingers, a reminder that no one on this island is truly escaping anything.