

Several hours earlier: Hannah: The Plus-One

Hannah allows herself to be swept up in the rhythm of the music, moving freely across the dance floor with Luis, a confident and talented dancer who effortlessly matches her energy. The band has electrified the atmosphere, filling the room with an intoxicating vibrancy that makes it easy to forget the weight of the day's events. For the first time in what feels like ages, she surrenders to the moment, letting the beat guide her and allowing herself to enjoy the thrill of uninhibited movement. The stress and loneliness that had gnawed at her earlier, fueled largely by Charlie's dismissive behavior, begin to dissolve into the background. Each step, each turn, becomes an act of defiance against the emotions that had threatened to drag her down. The world outside the dance floor ceases to exist, and for now, all that matters is the warmth of the music, the closeness of another human being, and the temporary illusion that she is unburdened by the past.

As the music intensifies, so does the proximity between Hannah and Luis, their movements naturally pulling them closer with an unspoken chemistry. There is a brief moment where their eyes meet, a silent acknowledgment of the growing tension, and Hannah suddenly feels the need to step away before she loses herself in something she might regret. Searching for a reason to distance herself, she suggests getting a drink, needing a reprieve from the dizzying mix of emotions surging through her. Luis, however, interprets this as an invitation rather than a retreat, following her without hesitation, his easy charm making it difficult to refuse his presence. The cool air near the bar provides some relief, and as she exhales, trying to regain her composure, they are greeted by Luis's friend, Jethro. He introduces himself casually, making a remark about how Luis had noticed Hannah earlier in the night, a comment meant to be playful but which stirs an unexpected reaction within her.

The mention of Luis's interest momentarily distracts Hannah, making her acutely aware of how much she craves being noticed, even if she simultaneously struggles with the idea of letting someone in. The conversation quickly shifts as Jethro and Luis reminisce about their university days, their camaraderie strengthened by shared experiences in rugby and late-night adventures. The mention of university brings a wave of nostalgia crashing over Hannah, momentarily forcing her to reflect on her own past, the choices she has made, and the moments that have led her to this very night. She pushes the thought aside, unwilling to let memories pull her away from the present, from the fleeting escape she so desperately wants to hold onto. Fueled by a sudden impulse, she orders tequila shots, something she normally wouldn't do, driven by a reckless need to drown out her thoughts. Luis and Jethro follow her lead, raising their glasses in a spontaneous toast, their laughter a stark contrast to the quiet turmoil brewing within Hannah.

The tequila burns as it slides down her throat, but instead of discomfort, she welcomes the warmth, the distraction, the false sense of invincibility that alcohol often provides. The moment is light, easy, filled with shared laughter and playful banter, allowing her to momentarily detach from the weight pressing against her chest. However, when Jethro casually mentions Edinburgh, a cold wave of reality settles over her, dragging her back to the reasons she is here in the first place. The name of the city is a sharp reminder of everything she has been trying to suppress, a painful contrast to the carefree atmosphere surrounding her. For a fleeting second, her resolve wavers, but she quickly forces a smile, unwilling to let the past steal this moment of escape. She takes another shot, hoping that if she drinks enough, she can blur the lines between past and present, between regret and temporary happiness.

Despite her best efforts, Hannah cannot completely escape the emotions tangled within her. The dance, the music, the alcohol—all of it serves as a momentary reprieve, but deep down, she knows that the weight she carries cannot be lifted so easily. The presence of Luis and Jethro provides a comforting distraction, but it does not erase the lingering thoughts of Charlie, the way his actions had affected her, the way they still had power over her even now. As she moves through the night, oscillating between moments of laughter and brief flashes of self-doubt, she realizes that no matter how hard she tries to lose herself in the revelry, some

wounds cannot be ignored. The escape she seeks is fleeting, the sense of freedom only temporary, as reality waits patiently at the edges of her consciousness, ready to pull her back in the moment she lets her guard down.