

Johnno: The Best Man

Perched atop the rugged battlements of the Folly, *the best man*, Johnno, and Will stand side by side, the howling wind carrying whispers of the past between them. Below, the restless sea crashes against the jagged rocks, an unrelenting force that mirrors the undercurrents of tension brewing beneath their camaraderie. From an outsider's perspective, they appear as two old friends enjoying a quiet drink before the wedding festivities truly begin, but beneath the surface, something unspoken lingers. Johnno, with his characteristic bravado, attempts to fill the silence with laughter, cracking jokes and reminiscing about the wild antics of their youth. Yet, despite the easy banter, Will remains guarded, his responses carefully measured, his polished exterior betraying none of the unease that flickers in his gaze. Their friendship, once effortless and unbreakable, now feels like a precarious balancing act—one misstep away from revealing the fractures beneath, testing the very bond between the groom and the best man.

The conversation takes a turn toward Jules's half-sister, Olivia, a topic that visibly unsettles Will. Johnno, ever the provocateur, makes a teasing remark about Olivia's striking beauty, but his words elicit an immediate and almost defensive response from Will. It is subtle, but telling—a brief moment where the mask of composure slips, replaced by something unguarded and raw. Will insists that Olivia is off-limits, that certain lines must never be crossed, a declaration that raises more questions than it answers. Johnno senses the weight behind his words, the careful restraint in his tone, as if Olivia's presence at the wedding stirs something Will would rather not confront. The exchange leaves Johnno with a lingering curiosity—what is it about Olivia that rattles Will, and why does he feel the need to shut down the conversation so quickly?

Their uneasy moment is soon interrupted by the arrival of Femi, Angus, Duncan, and Peter, their old schoolmates from Trevellyan's, whose laughter and easy camaraderie inject a sense of familiarity into the night. Their presence brings a flood of nostalgia, memories of late-night escapades, drunken dares, and the reckless abandon of youth. The school they once attended had shaped them in ways they never fully acknowledged—Trevs, as they called it, had been more than just an institution; it had been a world of unspoken rules, hierarchies, and fierce loyalty. Now, as grown men standing on the precipice of adulthood's full weight, they fall into familiar patterns, reliving their glory days with the same boisterous energy. But beneath the revelry, there's an undeniable sense of something being held back, something left unsaid.

Their stories turn to old traditions, particularly the infamous "Survival" game—nights spent in the darkness of the school's vast grounds, testing their endurance, their wit, and sometimes, their cruelty. What had once felt like an initiation into brotherhood now carries a different weight, a recognition that not all their antics had been harmless fun. There's a moment where their laughter falters, where nostalgia shifts into something heavier, as if they are all silently recalling events they do not wish to discuss. Will, the golden boy of their group, maintains his carefully crafted image, effortlessly maneuvering the conversation to safer ground. Johnno, watching him closely, realizes how much effort Will exerts in controlling the narrative, ensuring that the past remains exactly where he wants it—buried beneath charm and well-placed distractions.

As the night wears on, the mood oscillates between revelry and reflection, between the comfort of old friendships and the discomfort of what they refuse to acknowledge. The passage of time has eroded none of their shared history, yet it has created undeniable distance, the realization that they are no longer the boys they once were. The wedding should be a moment of celebration, yet to Johnno, it feels like a reckoning—a moment where the past and present collide, forcing them to confront the truths they have spent years avoiding. The unspoken tension between him and Will, the guarded nature of their interactions, the hints of something unresolved—Johnno knows that this weekend will bring more than just vows and champagne toasts.

As the others continue drinking, Johnno takes a quiet moment to observe Will, noting the slight stiffness in his posture, the way his gaze flickers toward the shadows beyond the Folly, as if expecting something—or

someone—to emerge. It is in that moment that Johnno realizes this wedding is not just a celebration for Will. It is an attempt at control, at erasing whatever it is that haunts him. But the past has a way of resurfacing, and Johnno suspects that before the weekend is over, whatever Will is trying to bury will claw its way back into the light.