

Olivia: The Bridesmaid

The weight of the evening settles heavily on *the bridesmaid* Olivia's shoulders as she drifts further from the wedding's revelry, drawn to the quiet solitude the island offers. The distant laughter and clinking of glasses fade behind her, swallowed by the wind as she moves through the darkened landscape. She has spent much of the night on the outskirts, lingering at the edges of conversations, forcing polite smiles, pretending to enjoy the moment while feeling entirely detached. The wedding is supposed to be a celebration, a grand display of love and unity, yet to the bridesmaid, it only highlights how adrift she feels—how separate she has always been. As she walks through the island's abandoned houses, their broken windows and weathered facades whispering of forgotten lives, she sees a reflection of herself in their hollowed-out remains. They are remnants of something that once held purpose but now stand empty, their foundations eroded by time, much like the sense of belonging she once thought she had.

The cold air bites at her skin as she continues onward, her thoughts drawn to memories of Charlie, a boy who once occupied so much of her heart. He had been her secret crush, the kind of infatuation that lived in stolen glances and imagined moments, never acknowledged, never reciprocated. Seeing him now, older but not necessarily wiser, married and yet seemingly just as restless, unsettles something deep inside her. He had been the embodiment of confidence back then, always at the center of attention, laughing too loudly, moving through life as though the world had been shaped for his convenience. But as she watches him from afar, his easy charm no longer feels quite so effortless, and the illusion of who he was begins to crumble. The realization is jarring—how often do we hold onto people as we once saw them, rather than who they have become? Perhaps even more unsettling is the thought that she has done the same with herself, clinging to old versions of her identity that no longer fit.

Needing space to breathe, Olivia finds herself heading toward the Whispering Cave, a hidden enclave on the island that few know about but many fear. The wind rushes through its narrow passageways, creating an eerie chorus of murmurs, as though the cave itself is alive with secrets. The sound unsettles her, yet it feels fitting—a place where the past and present seem to blur, where whispers fill the empty spaces just as they do in her mind. She steps inside, the darkness swallowing her whole, allowing herself a rare moment of raw vulnerability. Here, there is no need for pretense, no expectation to perform, just the quiet confrontation of her own thoughts. She recalls the sting of her recent breakup, the way it unraveled so painfully, leaving her with a hollow ache that refuses to fade. It was not just the end of a relationship; it was the confirmation of a fear she had always carried—that she is difficult to love, easy to leave.

She leans against the cave wall, pressing her palms into the cold stone as if grounding herself in something solid. The walls feel ancient, bearing the weight of time in their jagged edges, much like the heaviness she carries within. The silence is comforting until it is suddenly broken by the sound of footsteps approaching. Olivia tenses, her solitude shattered, but when the figure emerges into the dim light, she exhales. It's Hannah, Charlie's wife. For a moment, they simply stare at each other, the unlikeliness of this encounter stretching between them. Olivia wonders why Hannah is here, whether she too is looking for an escape, or if she has followed her out of curiosity. But there is no judgment in Hannah's gaze, only something quiet, something knowing. They are different in so many ways, yet in this moment, Olivia senses a shared understanding, a silent recognition of being outsiders at an event that demands they belong.

Without words, Hannah offers her a cigarette, and Olivia takes it, their fingers brushing briefly in the exchange. The flick of the lighter casts a glow between them, illuminating their faces in flickering light, highlighting the exhaustion in their eyes. Smoke curls into the air, filling the space between them, and with each exhale, Olivia feels the tension in her chest loosen just slightly. Their conversation is unhurried, each sentence carefully measured, neither of them feeling the need to fill the silence with empty words. They speak of the wedding in vague terms, their places within it, the roles they are expected to play. Olivia admits,

in a quiet voice, that she has never quite felt like she belonged, not just here, but anywhere. Hannah nods, her expression unreadable, but there is an agreement in her silence, a mutual understanding that neither of them fit as seamlessly into the world as they are supposed to.

The moment is fleeting, but for Olivia, it lingers—this brief companionship, this acknowledgment of loneliness shared. Hannah leaves first, disappearing back into the night, back to her place among the guests, and Olivia is left alone once more. Yet something about the encounter has shifted the weight in her chest, even if only slightly. As she extinguishes the last of the cigarette, watching the ember fade into darkness, she realizes that some connections, no matter how brief, are enough to remind her that she is not entirely alone. The cave still whispers around her, but now, its murmurs feel less like echoes of loss and more like reminders that even in isolation, understanding can find its way through the cracks.