

The next day: Hannah: The Plus-One

The morning after the harrowing events, Hannah boards the boat with Charlie, heading back to the mainland. The departure feels surreal, as though the tranquil waters and the shimmering sunlight are mocking the storm of emotions churning inside her. Most of the guests had already left earlier, leaving the family to linger in the aftermath of the tragedy, tethered to the island and its dark history. As the boat gently rocks over the waves, Hannah's gaze drifts back toward the island, now cloaked in shadows under a dense, looming cloud. It feels less like a piece of land and more like a predator lying in wait, ominous and unrelenting, its presence etched into her memory.

The striking contrast between the island's natural beauty and the suffocating darkness of its secrets amplifies the turmoil within Hannah. She cannot reconcile the serene image of sunlight glinting on the water with the reality of what transpired there. The revelation of Will's involvement in her sister's death feels like a wound that will never heal, raw and aching with every thought. It's as though the island itself has imprinted on her, a reminder that some places carry pain so profound they linger long after you leave them behind.

Her physical discomfort from the boat's motion pales in comparison to the emotional anguish she bears. Memories flood her mind, unrelenting, as she recalls the ferry ride to the island just days before. Back then, she and Charlie had shared lighthearted moments, their laughter filling the air, a reflection of their easy companionship. But now, silence stretches between them like an impassable void, heavy with the weight of all that has been left unsaid.

Charlie sits beside her, but he feels distant, lost in his own thoughts, his presence a mere shadow of the person who once brought her comfort. The closeness they once shared has been fractured, not by words or arguments, but by the sheer magnitude of

their shared grief and guilt. Hannah wonders if this silence is permanent, if the trauma they endured has built walls they can never dismantle.

The longer she sits in silence, the more she finds herself replaying their last conversation before everything fell apart. It feels like a lifetime ago, yet it lingers vividly in her mind, a stark reminder of how quickly everything changed. Exhaustion weighs heavily on her—physical, mental, and emotional—leaving her unable to articulate the storm within her or even begin to process the full extent of what they've been through.



This journey back to the mainland feels like more than a return to a physical place; it's an emotional passage, one marked by grief, guilt, and the daunting task of finding closure. The water stretches endlessly around them, mirroring the uncertainty she feels about the future and the path ahead. The boat moves forward, but Hannah feels stuck, tethered to the memories of the island and the horrors she cannot yet leave behind.

The island may be growing smaller in the distance, but its presence remains overwhelming in her mind. Its secrets, its darkness, and the pain it holds have left an indelible mark on her, one she knows will take more than time to fade. She glances at Charlie, hoping for a flicker of connection, but his face is unreadable, his thoughts locked away in the same private torment she feels.

For Hannah, the journey ahead is uncertain and filled with unresolved questions. How do you navigate a world that feels so altered, so unfamiliar, after everything you've learned and endured? She knows the road to healing will be long and fraught with challenges, but for now, all she can do is focus on surviving the moment, one breath at a time.

As the mainland grows closer, the reality of what awaits begins to sink in. The questions, the explanations, the lingering weight of what they've experienced—it all feels overwhelming, like a tidal wave she's not ready to face. But as she grips the edge of her seat and exhales deeply, she reminds herself that she is still here, still moving

forward, no matter how slow or difficult the journey might feel.

Even as the boat docks and the mainland comes into view, Hannah knows the hardest part of the journey is only beginning. The island may be behind her now, but its hold on her mind and heart will take far longer to loosen. She steps off the boat, steadying herself, bracing for the next chapter of a story she never wanted to live but must now carry with her. The search for closure, for answers, and for some semblance of peace is only just beginning.

