

The day before: Jules: The Bride

On the night before her wedding, The Bride, Jules, finds herself at a dinner that serves as both a reunion and an arena for unresolved family tensions. The evening is supposed to be a celebration, yet beneath the surface, it is anything but harmonious. Her father, Ronan, a self-made property developer whose thick Galway accent and commanding presence fill any room, makes a dramatic entrance, immediately disrupting the evening's balance. Hannah, Jules's guest and longtime friend, seems visibly startled by his brashness, unaccustomed to the way he dominates the space. At his side is Séverine, his much younger French wife, whose presence is a study in effortless grace, her beauty overshadowing any need for deeper conversation. Séverine moves through the gathering with the practiced ease of someone who has learned how to exist within the complicated dynamics of a powerful man's past marriages, balancing the expectations placed upon her without resistance. The Bride watches the way her father sizes up her fiancé, Will, and notices how the usually poised and confident man she is about to marry seems slightly diminished, his shoulders a little tighter, his words more carefully chosen.

As the dinner progresses, the weight of familial expectation becomes more apparent, creating an invisible force pressing against the edges of the gathering. Jules's mother, Araminta, an artist with a penchant for dramatics and self-indulgence, makes her presence known not through volume, but through carefully crafted remarks that are as cutting as they are subtle. The tension between mother and daughter is ever-present, woven into the fabric of their relationship, manifesting through passive-aggressive jabs that Jules endures with gritted teeth. The meal unfolds with a strange mix of forced civility and underlying competition, where each member of the family seems eager to prove something—whether it be status, importance, or control. Jules, always attuned to the unspoken games her parents play, finds herself caught between trying to keep

the peace and resisting the urge to lash out. Meanwhile, the estate's overseers, Aoife and Freddy, provide an unexpected sense of normalcy, their professional detachment making them the only people at the table seemingly unaffected by the complex web of history and grievances that everyone else is navigating. Their calm efficiency offers Jules a brief reprieve from the suffocating atmosphere, though it does little to soften the emotional strain of the night.

As the evening wears on, Jules is forced to confront the ghosts of her past while trying to stay focused on the future she is about to step into. Seated at the table, she steals glances at Hannah, her younger sister, their once-close bond now weakened by years of growing apart and unspoken resentments. She wonders if Hannah notices the same fractures in their family that she does, or if she has learned to tune them out, the way Jules once tried to. Thoughts of Charlie, her first love, creep in unexpectedly, forcing Jules to question whether she has truly moved on, or if there is still a part of her that lingers in the past, wondering what could have been. The emotional weight of the night reaches its peak when Araminta, raising a glass, offers a toast. What should have been a heartfelt acknowledgment of Jules's wedding turns into a moment for Araminta to bask in her own past glories, her words dripping with nostalgia and self-congratulation. Jules, accustomed to her mother's ability to make any event about herself, maintains a composed expression, offering the obligatory polite smile. But deep down, frustration simmers, the moment serving as yet another reminder of the complicated relationship she has spent years navigating.

As the evening winds down, Jules cannot shake the feeling that her wedding is not just a union of love, but a stage upon which old wounds, unspoken tensions, and unresolved conflicts are about to be laid bare. The island's isolation, which once seemed like an advantage, now feels more like a pressure cooker, containing every strained relationship within its borders with no easy escape. The weight of expectation from both her parents, the barely concealed tension with Will, and the unresolved echoes of her past all press against her, making her question whether the life she has carefully constructed is as stable as she once believed. As she prepares for the final hours before her wedding, she knows one thing for certain—this night, and the

emotions it has stirred, will not be easily forgotten.

