

Aoife: The Wedding Planner

The Wedding Planner is not just about orchestrating celebrations—it's about weaving stories of love, loss, and destiny. As the sun dips lower in the sky, casting elongated shadows over the rugged terrain, Aoife takes a brief respite from her responsibilities to visit the island's graveyard. This small, weathered resting place, surrounded by gnarled trees and eroded headstones, holds generations of Connemara's dead, their names fading beneath the relentless wind and salt air. The proximity of the burial ground to the Folly is not by design but by necessity—on an island with such limited dry land, the living and the dead are destined to share close quarters. As Aoife meanders through the uneven rows of graves, her thoughts drift to her own past, to the people she has lost and the weight of history she carries with her. The stillness of the place is deceptive, its quiet disturbed only by the distant crash of waves and the sharp cry of seabirds overhead. A solitary cormorant perches atop the ruined chapel, its black feathers slick against the evening light, and Aoife stiffens instinctively, as if a chapter from the wedding planner were unfolding right before her eyes.

The sight of the bird, known in local folklore as the "devil's bird," sends an unexpected chill through her, stirring something ancient and uneasy in her gut. In Connemara's oral traditions, cormorants are harbingers of misfortune, their presence often associated with death and bad omens. Though she tells herself it is nothing more than superstition, the weight of such beliefs lingers, much like the presence of the dead beneath her feet. She remembers childhood stories of sailors lost at sea, their souls carried on the backs of these birds, forever circling between worlds. A part of her wants to dismiss these thoughts as mere relics of an old, vanishing world, but standing there among the gravestones, with the bird's beady eyes fixed on her, the unease refuses to leave. Shaking off the moment's superstitious hold, she turns away, focusing instead on the path back to the Folly, where life—messy, chaotic, and ever-demanding—waits for her return.

Upon arriving, Aoife swiftly reintegrates herself into the controlled mayhem of wedding preparations, her mind shifting from the weight of history to the intricacies of the present. The reception space hums with activity—florists adjusting centerpieces, staff setting out glasses that catch the warm glow of flickering candlelight, and murmurs of final seating arrangements filtering through the air. Yet, amidst the orchestrated perfection, a moment catches her off guard—an encounter between the bride and Charlie, a man whose presence seems to shift the air between them. Their hushed conversation, tinged with an intimacy that suggests something unspoken, disrupts the polished façade of the wedding's picture-perfect narrative. Though their words are lost to distance, the body language speaks volumes, revealing a tension that doesn't belong to a mere casual acquaintance. Aoife has spent enough years in this profession to recognize the delicate cracks beneath a polished exterior, the quiet fissures that threaten to widen when no one is looking.

As she moves past them, she does not linger, though a part of her tucks away the observation as another small, unnoticed detail in the grander scheme of the night. Weddings, despite their careful choreography, have a way of unearthing what people work hard to keep buried—old loves, lingering regrets, the delicate fault lines between what is and what could have been. This place, this island with its history of the living and the dead pressed so closely together, seems to magnify those truths. Even as Aoife throws herself back into her work, ensuring that every detail of the evening remains flawless, she cannot shake the sense that something—whether bound by superstition, memory, or the quiet unraveling of hidden tensions—is stirring beneath the surface. The past is never quite past, and on an island steeped in ghosts, both real and imagined, the line between the two is often thinner than anyone cares to admit.