

# Earlier that day: Olivia: The Bridesmaid

Earlier in the day, The Bridesmaid, Olivia, moves through the wedding marquee with a singular focus—to drink enough to dull the relentless emotions that refuse to leave her alone. As The Bridesmaid, she is expected to share in the joy of the celebration, to stand by her sister Jules and smile for the photographs, but the weight of her own turmoil is too great to mask completely. She skirts the edges of the party, avoiding conversations and instead collecting half-finished drinks from abandoned tables, downing them quickly as if each sip will erase the past. The bitterness of alcohol lingers on her tongue, but nothing is as bitter as the memories she is desperately trying to suppress. Will's presence at the wedding is an unavoidable reminder of what she wants to forget, his charm acting as a thin veneer over the cruelty she has come to recognize. Their earlier dance, meant to be nothing more than a polite formality, had instead become a suffocating confrontation, punctuated by his warning that the past must remain buried.

The dance floor is alive with the energy of guests reliving their younger years, moving to nostalgic music with an abandon that Olivia cannot relate to. The contrast between their carefree movements and the storm brewing within her makes her feel even more disconnected from the world around her. She notices the waitstaff—young, disinterested, and clearly unimpressed by the extravagance of the event—and in their quiet judgment, she finds an unexpected sense of camaraderie. They, too, see the artifice of the night, the forced smiles, and the polished perfection that hides the flaws beneath. But Olivia's detachment is not just observational; it is deeply personal, exacerbated by the unwanted attention of certain male guests emboldened by alcohol and the looseness of the evening. The casualness with which they invade her space,

the way their hands linger too long on her waist or brush against her arm without invitation, fuels her discomfort. Each encounter is another reminder of how little control she has over her own existence, and the frustration festers beneath her skin like a slow-burning fire.

As the night wears on, Olivia leans harder into the numbness that alcohol provides, chasing an oblivion that remains just out of reach. She wants to disappear into the crowd, to blend into the haze of laughter and music, but her body betrays her, swaying unsteadily under the weight of exhaustion and inebriation. A fleeting reunion with her cousin Beth on the dance floor offers a brief reprieve from her downward spiral. Beth's presence, familiar and grounding, momentarily lifts her from the fog, but the reprieve is short-lived. In an instant, Olivia missteps, her heel catching on the uneven floor, and suddenly, she is falling. The impact is jarring, sending her sprawling to the ground in a graceless heap, her dress pooling around her like a broken promise. Gasps ripple through the crowd, heads turning in her direction, and for the first time that evening, Olivia is undeniably seen—but not in the way she wants.

Beth is the first to react, kneeling beside Olivia, her voice filled with concern as she calls for help. But Olivia barely registers the words, her mind swimming in a haze of alcohol and shame. The weight of the stares pressing down on her is suffocating, each pair of eyes a silent accusation, a reminder that she has failed to hold herself together. Her hands tremble as she tries to push herself upright, but the effort feels monumental, as if she is sinking into the floor itself. Someone reaches out to help her, but she recoils instinctively, unwilling to accept kindness when all she feels is humiliation. Beth's worry deepens as she looks at Olivia, sensing that this is more than just drunken clumsiness—that something far more insidious is gnawing at her cousin from the inside out.

The wedding carries on around them, the music and laughter resuming as though nothing has happened, but for Olivia, the night has irrevocably shifted. The illusion she has spent the entire evening trying to maintain has shattered, leaving her exposed and vulnerable in a way she never intended. No amount of alcohol can erase the past,

nor can it silence the voice in her head telling her that she will never outrun the truth. Will's warning still lingers in her mind, a sinister whisper reminding her that she is trapped, that her secrets are not hers to reveal. As she sits on the cold ground, surrounded by celebration yet utterly alone, Olivia realizes with a sinking certainty that she has already lost—because Will was right. The past is not something she can escape; it is something that will follow her, no matter how much she tries to drown it.

