

The day before: Aoife: The Wedding Planner

The day before the grand wedding of Will Slater and Julia Keegan, Aoife moves through the Folly with an air of quiet authority, her mind racing through a checklist of last-minute details. The atmosphere is charged with anticipation, and she knows from experience that beneath the veneer of celebration, tensions always simmer. She ensures that the crates of Guinness are chilled to perfection, the vintage Bollinger champagne is ready for toasts, and the marquee's lighting is set to cast just the right glow over the evening's festivities. Among the arriving guests, she takes note of subtle dynamics—the barely restrained energy of the best man and the ushers, their rowdiness already promising trouble, and the bride's half-sister, Olivia, moving on the outskirts of the gathering, lost in her own world. Aoife has spent years observing these moments unfold, understanding that weddings, for all their joy, are also stages for unspoken resentments, rekindled tensions, and long-held secrets. Still, her role is to ensure that, at least for one day, everything appears seamless.

Her dedication to detail stems not just from professionalism but from personal experience—an unspoken desire to create beauty and order where life often offers only chaos. As she oversees the lighting of the turf fires, ensuring warmth and comfort for the rehearsal dinner, she exchanges a brief word with Freddy, her partner in both work and life, about the evening's menu. The Connemara fisherman's chowder, a nod to the island's heritage, is simmering to perfection, alongside other carefully curated dishes that reflect both tradition and sophistication. Aoife finds solace in these small victories—ingredients prepared just right, logistics aligning flawlessly, a brief moment of calm before the inevitable whirlwind of the main event. But even amidst the controlled elegance of it all, she feels the weight of responsibility pressing against her. The Folly is more than just a venue; it is her passion, a chance to redefine herself and

prove that this place, once dismissed as a relic, can become something extraordinary.

The grandeur of the event is evident in every carefully selected element, from the towering, four-tiered wedding cake—transported with painstaking care—to the intricate floral arrangements flown in to match Julia’s exacting standards. But beneath the surface of perfection, Aoife is acutely aware of the delicate balancing act required to hold everything together. She watches guests exchange glances, notes the laughter tinged with something unspoken, and wonders how many hidden dramas will unfold before the night is over. Despite all the opulence, she understands that her job is about more than just aesthetics—it is about preserving an illusion, offering a momentary escape from reality. For Aoife, this wedding marks not just another successful event but a turning point, a reaffirmation of the decision to leave Dublin behind and invest herself fully in this place, this dream, this island.

As the evening stretches on, she allows herself a rare moment of reflection, sharing a quiet drink with Freddy before the chaos fully sets in. The familiar knot of anxiety lingers in her chest, a mix of excitement and apprehension, the weight of knowing that any misstep could unravel the careful orchestration of months of work. Yet, as she watches the flickering candlelight dance against the stone walls of the Folly, she reminds herself why she does this—to create something lasting, even if only for a night. The air is thick with anticipation, the promise of celebration layered with something more elusive, more fragile. With a final deep breath, she straightens her shoulders and steps back into the night, ready to ensure that, at least for now, the illusion of perfection remains unbroken.