Good evening everyone,

I’m honoured to stand here as Charlotte’s chief bridesmaid, her cousin, and her closest confidante. I’ve known Charlotte for as long as I’ve known how to climb into the biscuit tin at family gatherings, and I can say with absolute certainty: she has always been the heartbeat of our family.

Charlotte, I’ve watched you grow from the little girl who insisted we alphabetise our Beanie Babies into the woman who somehow alphabetises her spice rack after a 12-hour day and still has time to check in on everyone else. Kindness is your default, meticulous is your method, and adventurous is your spirit. You’re the person who will plan a hike with a laminated route, bring flapjacks for every dietary need, and then be the first to suggest, “Let’s see what’s over that hill.”

And then, eight years ago, over another hill, there was James.

They met at a local charity 10k in Bristol. Charlotte signed up because it was for a good cause; James signed up because, well, that’s James: dependable, the first to turn up and the last to leave, quietly making sure everyone else is all right. I like to imagine Charlotte at the start line, checking her laces twice, and James at her side with that easy, humble smile that says, “We’ve got this.” Somewhere between kilometre two and three, something clicked. A kind of rhythm. She sets the pace; he keeps everyone steady. And they’ve been running in step ever since.

Their first date was at a little riverside café. Charlotte told me afterwards, cheeks flushed, eyes bright: “He listened. He actually listened. And he didn’t mind when I brought out a small notepad to rank the brownies.” James, for the record, pretended not to be surprised by the notepad and simply said, “Shall we order two more for a fair sample size?” Charming and humble—how could she

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I met James properly when he turned up—unprompted—to help assemble Charlotte's flat-pack furniture. This was the night I learned two things: one, Charlotte's meticulous nature has limits when armed with an Allen key and an instruction booklet with no words; two, James is as dependable as they come. He arrived with tea, a toolkit, and no drama. Four hours later we had a wobbly bookcase, three spare screws, and a strong suspicion that this man wasn't going anywhere. He didn't announce himself with big gestures—he quietly proved himself, piece by piece, panel by panel.

They have built a life in that same way. They bought their first home together, filled it with laughter, board-game nights where Charlotte pretends not to be competitive and James genuinely isn't but somehow still wins, and weekends that start with muddy boots by the door after hikes that somehow turn into litter-picks because the two of them can't help but make the world a little better wherever they go. Volunteering for park clean-ups isn't a date idea for them—it's just what they do. That's the thing about these two: love, for them, is as much a verb as it is a feeling.

And then came the trip to Edinburgh. Charlotte, meticulous as ever, had the itinerary planned to the minute: galleries, coffee stops, viewpoints, and a back-up route in case of rain. But James, with that quiet, steady courage, found the perfect moment to write his own line into the schedule. On a windswept hill, under a sky that can never decide on one shade of grey, he asked her to marry him. She said yes, of course, and also, I believe, apologised to the itinerary. The photo she sent me that night was of their hands, slightly pink from the cold, and the happiest smile I've ever seen. You could feel the warmth through the screen.

If I were to describe them as a team, I'd say this: Charlotte is the map, James is the compass. She charts the course with care and courage; he keeps them true and steady. Together they are a quiet force—kind, resilient, and full of joy. She brings the adventure; he brings the calm. She notices every detail; he sees the bigger picture. And in all of it, they meet in the middle, where everyday life

becomes something beautiful.

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It’s in the small moments: the way Charlotte squeezes his hand when they’re crossing a busy road; the way James somehow remembers everyone’s tea order and always puts hers in the mug with the tiny chip that she insists is “character.” It’s in the Saturday mornings spent planning a hike and the Saturday evenings spent hosting friends, the kettle always on, the board games stacked like promises of laughter. It’s in the Sunday park clean-ups, where they remind us all that love isn’t just about looking at each other—it’s about looking in the same direction and making that view better for everyone.

I want to say something to you each, if I may.

Charlotte, my fierce, thoughtful, luminous cousin—your kindness isn’t soft. It’s sturdy. It builds things. You are meticulous not because you crave control, but because you care. You create safety and joy for others, and today, you’ve chosen someone who does the same for you.

James, you are dependable in a way that has nothing to do with being boring and everything to do with being brave. You show up. You listen. You carry the heavy bag without being asked. Your humility makes space for everyone else to shine, and yet here you are, shining anyway—because real goodness does that.

Together, you’ve taught those of us who love you what partnership looks like. It looks like muddy boots, shared biscuits, slow mornings, fast laughs, and a home that’s always one chair short because you’ve squeezed in another friend. It looks like walking into a room and immediately finding the other person’s eyes, not because you’re checking in, but because that’s where home is.

People talk about soulmates as if it’s fate rolled in glitter. But watching you two, I think it’s simpler and braver than that. It’s choosing—every day—to be kind. To be patient. To say sorry. To hold hands when the road is smooth and when it’s steep. To carry a bag of compostable rubbish out of a park, and to carry each other through the messier bits of life with the same easy grace.

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My wish for you is this: May you never lose the urge to see what's over the next hill. May you always find a new board game to learn together and new friends to teach it to. May your home be perpetually full—of chatter, of warmth, of half-finished crossword puzzles and fully finished cups of tea. May you keep turning up for your community, and even more so, for each other. And on the days when the world is heavy, may you remember that you two are the kind of people who make it lighter—together.

Eight years in, and today begins a new chapter, but not a new story. It's the same one that started with the rhythm of that first 10k, carried across a riverbank café, assembled with three leftover screws and a lot of laughter, sealed on a breezy Edinburgh hill, and brought here, to this room, with all of us who love you cheering you on.

So, to the newlyweds—Charlotte and James—thank you for letting us witness the way you love.

Everyone, please raise your glasses.

To Charlotte and James: may your hikes be long, your game nights loud, your clean-ups rewarding, and your partnership ever kind, ever steady, and ever adventurous.

To love, to laughter, to a lifetime together. Cheers.

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