Rehearsal dinner toast: what to say, with short examples

A rehearsal dinner toast should run about two to three minutes: who you are, one small story, and a glass raised to the couple. In the US it is a real event the night before the wedding. In the UK the closest thing is often just a meal the night before, and you may not be asked to speak at all.

Checklist

- [ ] What a rehearsal dinner is
- [ ] Who usually speaks
- [ ] How it differs from the wedding speech
- [ ] A four-part shape
- [ ] Three short examples
- [ ] How long to make it
- [ ] Reception only. You can still be at the dinner, and you can still be asked to stand for a glass, but you do not deliver the speech. A single sentence of thanks is plenty if someone pulls you up.
- [ ] A short toast at the dinner, and the main speech tomorrow. Different stories. Same warmth. Do not premiere the reception speech to a table of twenty and then do it again for a hundred.
- [ ] Save the best story for the wedding if you are speaking twice. The dinner gets the story that is tender, odd, or only funny to people who already like him. The reception gets the story that still works when half the room has never heard his name said by you.
- [ ] You can be more particular. A nickname, a sibling, a town, a terrible flat. More of the room is already inside the joke. You still should not be unkind. His new in-laws may be meeting you tonight.
- [ ] Thanks matter more, performance matters less. People are here because they have done something: hosted, travelled, stood in a rehearsal for an hour. Notice that.
- [ ] Do not run the wedding from the toast. Timings, seating and who has the rings are a conversation, not a speech. If you are also the person keeping the day on track, that job is in what the best man does on the wedding day, not in this glass.
- [ ] Who you are, in one sentence. Name, and how you know the person you are toasting. If both families are hearing you for the first time, this sentence is doing real work.

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