The Last Slice

An original book-club case. Read once for the story and again for evidence.

The case

At the reunion, Aunt Della put a slice of caramel cake in a blue tin and asked Jules to save it for Leon. “He always misses dessert driving everybody home.” Jules put the tin beside the coffee. An hour later, eight-year-old Nia came in from the rain. Her paper plate had folded on the walk from the buffet. She had carried the photographs inside first. Her cake was still out there in a puddle.

The buffet was bare. Jules opened the tin and cut the slice in two. Nia ate her half standing up. When Leon got back, Della carried him the tin herself. He looked at the half slice, then at the little fork Jules had left beside it. “I would have shared,” he said. Della gathered the coffee cups. “I know,” she said. “I wanted somebody to ask you.”

The charge

Was Jules justified in dividing the slice before Leon returned? Decide whether Jules made the right call and name the detail that carries the most weight.

A question for the jury

What changes if Leon meant “I would have shared” as gratitude? What changes if he meant it as a reproach?