

'Kieran is the most charismatic person you'll ever meet'

When Kieran Culkin won an Oscar, his acceptance speech thrust his British wife, Jazz Charton, into the spotlight. **Hadley Freeman** meets her

Photographs **Sarah Tahon** Styling **Dione Davis**

Exactly 24 hours before Kieran Culkin accepted his best supporting actor Oscar earlier this month, he was attending to far more important business: reserving a table for me. His wife, Jazz Charton, and I had arranged to meet at a hotel bar on Sunset Boulevard, but that morning the hotel cancelled my reservation due to a "private event". A few hours later the concierge told me that, in fact, a table had now been set aside for us. "Kieran asked for an extra-quiet one," he said. In this town the only currency that matters is celebrity.

Yet I wanted to meet Charton, who was born and raised in London, because she seems so unaffected by celebrity. Her Instagram is funny and chaotic and could be that of any young mother with small kids (their daughter Kinsey Sioux, known as Zissou, is five and their son Wilder is three) — just with a few more photos from the red carpet these days. I, like millions of others, have been watching Culkin on screen since he was eight, when he appeared in *Home Alone* alongside his brother Macaulay, so hearing him gush about Charton in interviews has been like watching a relative fall in love: you can't help but be charmed. When he won an Emmy last year for his performance as Roman Roy in *Succession*, he joked in his acceptance speech that his wife promised him a baby if he won, which she then joked about on her Instagram. I wanted to know more about this Englishwoman who has made Culkin, 42, so happy. So I sent her a message on Instagram, she replied, and that's how we ended up in a restaurant in LA, at a table booked by an imminent Oscar winner.

"I know Kieran comes across as this quirky guy but he's actually really sensible," Charton, 37, says when I express my gratitude for his table reservation. She is wearing burgundy leggings and a matching jumper, all

Jazz Charton
with her
husband,
Kieran Culkin,
at a post-
Oscars party



from Zara, having just got off the plane from New York, where the family live. "That was one of the ways I knew he was the right person. Kieran is the most charismatic person you'll ever meet and you just want to be around him. But I also wanted to be like him in terms of how he behaves. Nothing really fazes him."

She realised that after they had their first fight. "I tried to walk away from him, to be on my own. But he said, 'No, what are you doing? We need to talk about this. How are you feeling?' I thought, 'Wait, what?' Because that is *not* what I usually did after a fight."

Charton grew up in Shepherds Bush, west London, the daughter of a single Caribbean-French mother who was raised in Sweden, had worked as a model and is now an artist. It was a multicultural, bohemian upbringing, and Charton is fluent in French and "OK" in Swedish. But it wasn't easy. "My mother tried her best, let's say, and we're very close now, but I didn't have the happiest of childhoods. I had this fantasy that as a grown-up I would live in America, and that was my only goal."

After university in London, Charton "got on the first plane to New York" and found a job working on music for advertising, "which I think they only gave me because my name is Jazz — because I have absolutely no musical talent".

Less than a year after she arrived in the city, when she was just 24, Charton went to a bar in the East Village with a friend. When her friend went to the bathroom, Culkin immediately sat in his chair next to Charton and asked: "Is that your boyfriend?"

She knew he was an actor because she used to work at a video rental shop, so she recognised his face from the cover of his 2002 film, *Igby Goes Down*. "He was very forward but hilariously so, and he said, 'There's this Indian restaurant that's really good.' I said, 'Oh cool, can

Getty Images



Top and skirt,
prices on
application, and
sandals, £800,
Khaite. Love
bracelet,
£4,550, Cartier

‘It’s one of the real differences between us — Kieran grew up being in this pack of eight siblings, whereas I’m used to being by myself’

you give me the name?’ And he said, ‘No, you idiot, I want to take you there.’”

Just over a year later he proposed. “We were about to go on a road trip to California, so we were having a going-away party with our friends before we left. Kieran said, ‘Wait, come outside, I want to tell you something.’ And he got down between two dumpsters and said, ‘Will you marry me?’ I was, like, ‘Really, here? I mean, yes, obviously, but really?’”

She was 26 when they got married in 2013. “I know, so young. It’s devastating — he took my best years. I tell him he’s just my green card husband,” she says with a smile. They waited six years before having kids “because we just really enjoyed our free time — and obviously that’s all gone now”. Plus she never especially wanted kids, having grown up as an only child with a mother whom she felt was not especially maternal. Culkin, on the other hand, grew up as one of eight siblings. “It’s one of the real differences between us — he grew up being in this pack, whereas I’m used to being by myself.”

In 2019 she became pregnant “kind of by accident”, and being alone with her daughter brought back painful memories of being an only daughter with her mother: “Kieran was away and it all triggered something in me. It reminded me so much of my childhood and I never felt more alone. I said to Kieran, ‘I need to have another baby to break this cycle.’ And now my kids are best friends and I’m so happy I could give that to them.”

How did she feel about his joke that she would have to have a baby if he won an Emmy for *Succession*, which he did? She mock-but-also-not grimaces: “It makes my uterus become public, you know? So many people said, ‘So when are you going to have this baby?’ And I was, like, ‘Well now, never!’”

Culkin nearly dropped out of making *A Real Pain* because he didn’t want to be filming in Poland away from the children. Emma Stone, one of the film’s producers, talked him out of it. “I don’t think he was ever really going to drop out, he just needed to have that moment and to work through it and then he was fine. But my main concern was about Emily [Stone’s real name], because she’s a really good friend of ours, so my reaction was, ‘Don’t piss her off!’” Charton says. Anyway, she and the children came out to Poland with him for a few weeks, as they always do when he’s shooting. “It was great when he was in Tuscany,” she says, referring to the Italian section of the third series of *Succession*. “Those Italians really love you when you have children.”

Once her children were born, Charton switched careers to being a freelance writer, allowing her to travel along with Culkin. And her multilingual childhood has been useful for her peripatetic adulthood. “Although the only time the Swedish has come in handy was when I met Alexander Skarsgard at a *Succession* party and I thought, ‘Oh great, I can whip out the Swedish!’ And so I started speaking it and Kieran went, ‘Really?!’”



Dress, £472, Silk Laundry. Ellipses hoop earrings, £503, and Jean cuff, £1,235, Agmes

Hair Ayumi Yamamoto at Bridge Artists using Leonor Grey. **Make-up** Akiko Owada at The Wall Group. **Local production** Francesca Valente for 102 NYC. **Location** Casa Valle design gallery, Tribeca, New York

By now Charton has to go up to her hotel room to try on dresses for tomorrow. “Nope, still don’t know what I’m wearing. I guess I’ll see what fits,” she says with a shrug.

It turned out that a gorgeous gold-sequin Tom Ford column dress is what fitted, as everyone saw when the cameras frequently cut to her during Culkin’s acceptance speech. He mentioned how, after the Emmys last year, she accepted that she now owed him a third baby, given he had won the award: “I turned to her and I said, ‘Really, I want four.’ And she turned to me, I swear to God this happened, she goes, ‘I will give you four when you win an Oscar.’” Cut to Charton looking shocked and laughing and nodding. “I held my hand out, she shook it, and I have not brought it up until just now. You remember that, honey? You do? Then, I just have this to say to you, Jazz. Love of my life, ye of little faith. No pressure. I love you. I’m really sorry I did this again. And let’s get cracking on those kids!”

About an hour after his speech, I bump into Charton and Culkin in the atrium of the Dolby Theatre, where the Oscars are held. They were excitedly celebrating his victory with Stone when Charton spots me and runs over to hug me. “Hi, I’m Kieran,” her husband says with a grin, holding out a hand. I ask Charton how she is feeling about now being on the hook for not one kid but two. She rolls her eyes, but this time she is all smiles and no grimace. ■