

About a year and a half ago, the stories of Max, Lily, Adam, Amanda, and Shane fell out of our imaginations and landed on paper (hypothetical paper, of course). Even though we've moved on from these characters, they'll always hold a special place in our hearts. So, as Max's birthday loomed nearer, we decided we needed to revive them. And through the help of reader suggestions, revive we did. What follows is the first of ten (or so) chapters we wanted to write--and publish in the spring--to give our original cast of whackos another chance to share their stories. Hope you love them as much as we do. Happy birthday, Max!

Before the "I Do"

"Really? The Pokey? That is an offensively disgusting name for a strip club. *This* is the best you could do for my last weekend as a single woman?" I stared up at the windowless building constructed of cinder blocks. "You promised me glitz and glamour. Not grime and gloryholes." I shot an accusatory glare at Amanda who looked completely unconcerned with my dissatisfaction. *Worst Maid of Honor ever.*

"It's totally different inside. Think *Magic Mike* meets *Cirque Du Soleil*," Amanda explained.

"Or *Shawshank Redemption* meets *Brokeback Mountain*," Trish muttered.

"I heard that," Amanda chastised as she pulled the heavy wooden door open for us. "Entre, my dear lady."

"Gee, thanks. Glad I at least got to skip the diseases multiplying on the door handle." I honestly would've been content to skip the entire outing altogether, but Amanda wasn't having it. Since Max and I were having a small wedding, I was only having Amanda stand at the altar with me. With no bridal party, I felt we could skip the bachelorette party as well. After she threw a massive hissy-fit, Amanda and I had compromised: I'd let her throw a party if she promised to keep it small. Which was how I ended up in my own sad version of *Boogie Nights* with my closest girlfriends. "And I would like it noted that I took you to Atlantic City for your bachelorette party." I walked into the small lobby and waited for Amanda to enter.

"You really want to go there, Lily? There almost wasn't a wedding after my bachelorette party. Or did you forget that little fact?" Amanda ushered us toward a velvet rope that was manned by two gigantic specimens wearing only black pants and bow ties.

"That wasn't my fault. You can thank Kyle and his big mouth for that one."

"Ugh," Kate groaned. "Can we *not* talk about that night?"

I patted Kate on the shoulder. "Sorry, girl, but she needs to hear it. She needs to know how inadequate she is compared to me."

Amanda shook her head before approaching the bouncers. "Hi, fellas. We're here for some naked men. I reserved a few tables. We should be under Reed."

"I thought you were the only one allowed under Reed," Tina chimed in.

"I'm the only one under, on top of, bent in front of, and ..." Amanda's voice died off as she realized the bouncers were staring at her. She cleared her throat. "I'm very open-minded."

I burst out laughing. "*That's* how you explain yourself to strangers?"

Amanda shrugged. "They're wearing sequined bow ties. Who are they to judge?" She looked back at the two behemoths in front of us. "No offense."

"None taken," the giant on the left said as he unhooked the rope. "Take this slip over to those roped off tables." He pointed as he spoke, gesturing toward a segregated seating area with red velour booths. "Chaps will seat you once you get there."

"Great. Thanks." Amanda strode across the venue like she owned the joint. Not that owning a place like The Pokey would have been a huge accomplishment, but I still admired how that girl commanded a room. Her skinny jeans and silk tank hugged her toned yet curvy frame like a second skin as her blonde hair swayed in time with her hips. If I had been born with a dick, I would've been all over that.

"Enjoy your night," one of the giants holding the rope added with a wink as I walked past him. *Yup, I still got it.*

I quickly took in the room as we walked toward our tables. The floors were hardwood, which seemed like a hygienic choice. I also needed to retract my earlier accusations. It definitely wasn't as bad inside as it was outside. The place looked clean and modern. The bar was stainless steel with black high-backed chairs. And the seating had more of a lounge feel than the stainless steel interrogation room chairs I'd expected. Not that I knew first hand, but who hasn't watched their share of *Law and Order* marathons?

And then there was the stage. The dark glossy flooring was spotless and illuminated by numerous strobe lights. The show hadn't started yet, but the chains hanging from the ceiling promised interesting things. By the time I reached where the other girls were standing, Amanda was smirking at me.

"I don't want to say I told you so, but--"

"Fuck off," I groused.

Amanda laughed and turned her attention to a striking man wearing--what else--chaps. He did have jeans underneath them, and I wasn't sure if this made me thankful or disappointed.

"You must be Chaps," Amanda greeted.

"That's me. You sexy ladies sitting in my section tonight?" He held out his hand to take the ticket from Amanda and inspected it before unhooking the rope and motioning us through.

"Pretty sure this is about to become *our* section. You're in for it tonight, honey. We came to play. Especially that one," Amanda said as she motioned to Trish. "Get her drunk enough and she'll confess her undying love to you in front of this entire place."

“One time!” Trish yelled. “That happened one time and you never let me forget it.”

“How often do you think something like that normally happens? Even once is too many. My biggest regret is that I wasn't there to see it.” Amanda sat down in the booth and scooted toward the middle to make room.

“Just because it took an act of God to admit your feelings to someone doesn't mean the rest of us should be ashamed of going after what we want,” Lily said, defending the seriously outgunned Trish.

“Who's 'us' exactly? I know you're not talking about yourself because you confessed your feelings against a wall outside of your favorite watering hole after months of denial.”

“Judas! I told you that in confidence.”

Amanda flipped her hair behind her shoulder. “Don't care.”

“I'm going to love waiting on you girls tonight. I can already tell,” Chaps said smiling. “What can I get you to drink? And do you need dollar bills for the show?”

“Nope,” Amanda said as she reached into her purse and withdrew a brick of cash. “I got us covered.”

“Wow, it must have taken you a whole year to earn all of those ones,” Trish sniped.

“Careful, Sparky, before I give you a verbal lashing in front of this entire establishment.”

Trish seemed to be on the verge of unleashing a comeback, but wisely thought better of it. She'd come out of her shell over the past year, but she still wasn't anywhere close to Amanda's position on the smartass spectrum.

We ordered drinks and struck up easy conversation, mostly about gym gossip. Shane's CrossFit gym was like a brothel, and Amanda was its Madam. She knew who was hooking up with whom, who *had* hooked up with whom, and who *wanted* to hook up with whom. She was like a sex whisperer.

“Speaking of laying serious pipe, how are things with you and Kyle, Kate?” Amanda asked as she lifted her martini to her lips.

“Nice segue,” I praised.

“I've been practicing. Kate, spill. How's it been living with Captain Clean?” Amanda pressed.

The mention of Kyle had Kate beaming. “It's been great. No complaints.”

“That's good. I'm happy for you guys.” Amanda turned her attention toward Trish. “I'm not even going to ask about your love life because it probably involved band camps and flutes.”

“Ha Ha.” Trish rolled her eyes but it was obvious she was trying to suppress a smile.

“What about you, Tina?”

“What about me?”

“You’re the most experienced married person here. Any advice for our Lily before she marries Max?”

“Fuck him often and tell me all about it. I need to live vicariously through someone,” Tina joked as she sipped her water.

Amanda looked horrified at the prospect of not having sex. “You’re not getting laid? I thought pregnant chicks were horny all the time.”

“It’s better now but the first trimester sucked. I didn’t even feel like putting on shoes, let alone being impaled by my husband’s --.”

“Okay, let’s stop that thought right there. I don’t need to hear the warped way you were going to relate sex to wearing shoes,” I interjected.

“You can hear about it in the car when I drive your drunk asses home.”

Tina was a great sport for still coming out with us even though she was fifteen weeks pregnant. Though I did have serious concerns for her unborn offspring as she sat on a seat that had probably had more semen splattered on it than a prison shower floor.

For the next forty-five minutes, I had no need to move. Chaps kept the drinks coming, and the girls made sure I had the perfect vantage point so that I could observe all the club’s happenings. So far I’d seen one girl fall off a barstool and another stick her hands down a guy’s pants. We’d thought nothing of it until he’d pointed out that he wasn’t a stripper. He’d just been there to pick up his fiancé and her friends who’d gotten so plastered that one of them had climbed on stage during one of the performances and started taking off her own clothes. *Thank God we have Tina*. The last thing we needed was for Max or Shane to catch one of us sucking on a stripper’s nipple like a hungry puppy.

Not that that would happen. I’d make sure Amanda stayed far enough away from the scantily clad cop she’d been eyeing since we’d arrived if it killed me.

“I’m going to go to the bathroom,” I announced loudly so the girls could hear me over the music. “Anyone coming?”

“Hopefully me when I ride that cowboy later tonight,” Trish said with a nod toward the freshly oiled specimen who was holding a lasso nearby.

We all let out a loud laugh.

“You’re not even riding shotgun in Tina’s SUV,” I said. “That was a good one though.”

“Thanks,” she said with a proud smile as she put her drink down and picked up her clutch.

Trish and I made our way through the sweaty bodies and headed toward the restrooms. The line wasn't as long as I'd anticipated, and to my surprise, the bathrooms actually appeared to be fairly sanitary. But the fact that I'd paid attention to how much water was splashed across the counter only confirmed that I was still way too sober for my own bachelorette party. "I'm not drunk enough," I said, matter-of-factly as I popped my lips together after applying a little gloss in the mirror.

Trish gave me a slight nod. "Just pace yourself," she said. "You have all night. Literally. No way Amanda's just gonna let us fall asleep when we get back to her house."

I threw my paper towel in the trash can and headed back out toward our table. "Well she might. But we'll probably wake up with penises drawn all over our faces."

Trish laughed, but stopped suddenly when the reality of what I'd said sunk in. "The wedding's next week. Permanent marker takes forever to come off completely. Would she really do that?"

"I'd make sure you drink some coffee," I said with a shrug as I sat back down in my seat.

"What the hell were you doing in there?" Amanda asked. "You two took forever."

"We were gone for like ten minutes."

"Whatever. You're delaying our drinking. We got some pink Starburst shots while you were gone."

I took an inventory of the small glasses set in front of us--too many to count at a glance. "What's in these?" I asked, bringing the light pink liquid up to my nose to smell it.

"It's tastes like a pink Starburst and it gets you drunk," Kate replied. "Does it matter what's in them?"

"Well, when you put it like that—"

"I'd like to make a toast," Amanda interrupted, raising two glasses in the air, and the rest of us followed suit. "To Lily's last weekend of freedom."

But something told me she was exaggerating. She'd been married just over a year, and she hadn't lost a bit of freedom yet. Shane on the other hand...

"To Lily's last weekend of freedom," everyone parroted. All of us clinked glasses with one another, spilling pink liquid on each other's hands before we downed both drinks.

Well, everyone except Tina, who was sipping her water enviously as she eyed our sweet-tasting concoctions.

We downed one more shot each, and I was finally beginning to get a pretty good buzz going. The five of us clapped along to the standard strip club classic "It's Raining Men" as four costumed guys with umbrellas danced on stage.

I was beginning to loosen up a little as I moved in my seat to the rhythm of the music. I had to hand it to Amanda, these guys definitely had some moves. And they were fucking gorgeous. Tan with hard abs, chiseled chests, and muscular legs. They were easy on the eyes. At least for now. I tried to ogle them as much as possible, since I could already tell that the alcohol coursing through my body was beginning to make it increasingly difficult to see clearly. And it didn't help that the lights had gotten dimmer than they already were.

But that didn't stop me or the rest of the pheromone intoxicated females from screaming like twelve-year-olds at a Justin Bieber concert when we heard the first few notes to Genuine's "Pony" and a sweat suit-clad gentleman appeared as the curtain opened. He pulled on his red baseball cap to lower it even more than it already was and unzipped his hoodie to reveal a tight wifebeater underneath.

He danced for a few seconds, thrusting his hips and doing his best Channing Tatum impression--which sadly wasn't all that good. I actually felt a little bad for him. *Maybe he's new.* His hands ran down his chest once before pulling the undershirt over his head to reveal his chest. He dropped to the stage so he could hump it, which was pretty damn hot. But unfortunately Magic Mike's flips were conspicuously absent and replaced by a simple jump off the stage.

"He's coming toward us, Lil," Amanda screeched.

But before I could prepare myself, he was on me. Rubbing his head into my stomach and lifting me off the ground before carrying me to the stage. I kept my eyes shut, too mortified to look around at all the other screaming females. And I certainly wasn't going to look at the man hauling me around like King Kong, who now had his face practically between my legs as he placed me on my back against the hard stage, then slid himself up the length of my body, and gyrated his crotch against me.

Finally I let my hands drift lightly over his biceps and around to his back. *Might as well enjoy the moment.*

"How much more of a show do you want me to give these girls, doll?"

Holy. Fucking. Shit. "Max?" I said, finally opening my eyes wide to see my fiance on top of me, his cap now backwards so I could see his cool blue eyes staring down at me.

He leaned down to give me a kiss, the rough hairs on his face scratching my soft skin in a way that made me entirely unconcerned that there was a roomful of strangers watching our every move.

"Oh my God!" I heard Amanda yell. Apparently she'd just realized that the stripper I was kissing on stage was my future husband.

And 'Oh my God' was right. No matter how hot these other men were, no one could turn me on like my own. I melted into Max, our lips pressing against each other until he pulled away to whisper in my ear, his voice raspy with need. "Maybe we should go someplace a little more private."

"Privacy is overrated."

Max stood, pulling me with him and laughing softly. The girls had moved next to the stage, and off to the side I could see Shane, Trevor, Kyle, and a few of Max's other friends.

As I took in the hundreds of eyes staring at a half-naked Max, my fuzzy mind suddenly felt too sober. "Put your clothes back on," I said, feeling suddenly possessive.

"Not you, buddy," Amanda yelled to Shane. "Get your ass out there!"

I didn't wait to see if Shane complied. I was too focused on getting Max alone. "I can't believe you did that," I said when we were finally offstage.

"Can you *really* not believe it?"

"No, it's just a saying." I rolled my eyes playfully. "But I'm surprised they let you do it."

"These places don't exactly have a lot of professional regulations. I gave the owner two hundred dollars and a signed jersey."

"How romantic," I said with a smirk as Max pulled me by the hand through an open dressing room door backstage. But the truth is I'd never get tired of this--how Max always managed to surprise me, filling my mind with thoughts of him whenever he had the chance.

He closed the door behind us when we entered. "It kind of is, actually," he said, forcing my back against the hard surface and running his fingertips beneath my sheer top. "I can't stand the thought of another guy getting to do what I just did to you."

I let out a shaky moan against his throat. "Jealous, are we?"

"Shh," he whispered, his tongue finding that spot behind my ear that made me squirm. "Less talking," he said. "That's *my* job."

His smile against my neck made me shiver. My nails scratched his bare back since he hadn't listened to me when I'd told him to put his shirt on. And I could feel his erection pushing on my stomach through his sweatpants. My head fell back, hitting the door with a thud as Max licked and sucked on my flesh hungrily. "These have to go," he said, popping the button of my jeans. "You know a skirt would have made this easier."

"Well, I didn't exactly think I'd be getting laid in a stripper's dressing room when I chose my outfit for tonight."

"You better *not* have," he said with a low laugh as he helped me shimmy out of my pants.

Max moved to sit on a nearby swivel chair and pulled me onto his lap. On instinct, I began to move against him, rubbing myself over him. I could already feel how close I was. The tension between us and Max's presence alone were enough to get me wet. They always were.

"You should probably stop that," Max said.

I moved quicker, bearing down on him. “Or what?”

“Or I’ll have to make you,” he said, biting my lip and grabbing ahold of my hips to cease my movement. Then he reached between us, pushing his sweatpants down to free himself.

My gaze immediately fell to his cock, already slick with his need for me. “I want that,” I said.

Max gripped the back of my neck and pulled my ear to his mouth. “That’s good,” he said, “because I’m gonna fucking give it to you.” Then he yanked my thong to the side, grabbed his thick shaft, and practically impaled me with it. He thrust upward hard and fast several times and let out a groan. “So fucking warm,” he said. “Love the way it feels inside you.”

I pulled on the back of the chair for resistance and wrapped my legs around it. Our position, combined with gravity, made him go even deeper than he usually did. And I loved every second of it. The way our bodies fit together as one, how we always found the perfect rhythm with each other. And this time that rhythm was quicker, rushed as we sprinted toward the finish line. Our breathing grew more ragged and hot, our movements increasingly sudden until I knew we’d both tumble over the edge at any moment. “Max,” I breathed, knowing he’d never tire of hearing me say his name.

“Jesus, Lil, you know what that does to me. I’m about to fucking lose it.”

So was I. With every thrust upward, Max brought me a little closer to release. Finally I couldn’t wait any longer. My insides tightened and I let go, feeling my climax climb up my core with each pulse.

Then I felt Max jerk inside me, his breathing heavy with curses of pleasure as he slowed until he stopped moving inside completely. Then we stayed still, except for the rise and fall of our chests against each other as he held me.

And that’s when I knew Amanda’s toast was bullshit. This right here...*this* was freedom.