

MAWWAGE IS WHAT BWINGS US TOGETHA TODAY

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1:19 PM

The wedding ceremony was scheduled to begin at 2 o'clock, but the bridesmaids were roaring drunk by noon.

Four of them were giggling with the bride, who had taken a few swigs of the wine herself (carefully, so as not to spill on her dress) but one of them was sitting alone in a corner with a bottle all to herself, her flowing, pastel pink dress hiked up around her knees. The officiant, after letting the bride and bridesmaids know that she was there and ready to take her position as needed, asked the lone bridesmaid if she was okay.

"Yeah I'm fine," came the morose answer. The girl looked up at the officiant through her thick eyelashes and pursed her lips together. "Just...just a lot of giggling happening over there. Bit too much for me."

The officiant racked her brain, wondering why this bridesmaid looked so familiar. Then it hit her: the girl was the sister of the groom, most likely included in the wedding party as a courtesy by the bride. Her face was a spitting image of her brother, only her hair was quite a few shades blonder and the lines of the chin and nose were softer. After a moment, the officiant remembered the girl's name: Alyssa.

"Okay." The officiant paused, feeling obligated to comfort or advise Alyssa. "I know weddings are hard."

Alyssa grimaced. "*I'm not losing a brother, I'm gaining a sister,*" she replied in a mocking tone, signaling that she had heard this phrase

more than a couple times in the last few months. “Weddings are just so...ridiculous, aren’t they?” She took another swig. “But maybe I’m just jealous.” Whether she was jealous of the ceremony or of her brother, Alyssa did not specify.

The officiant nodded awkwardly, barely managing to hide her amusement, and bid her farewell until the ceremony.

“Hey,” Alyssa called as the officiant began to walk away, causing her to pause in the doorway and turn back. “I’ve got a question. You know when you say that “Speak now or forever hold your peace line”? How many times has someone actually said something?” When she smiled, one side of her mouth rose higher than the other in a coquettish manner.

The officiant thought about that for a second before replying: “Well, I’ve been doing this for about five years now and, so far, no one has.”

“Damn,” Alyssa said, lifting the bottle to meet her lips. The officiant, understanding that the conversation was over, left to ponder the question as she retreated to her own small dressing room. The first couple of times she had uttered that phrase, she had gotten nervous that someone would interrupt the ceremony and cause a scene. After a couple hundred ceremonies, however, the line had just become a part of her speech, so familiar that she had a practiced rhythm in its utterance (line, timed pause, next line). Although she tried to make each ceremony unique— different inflections, different pause lengths between lines – that particular section of the speech was always the same.

So far, the only drama in this ceremony was that the bride, explaining that her family was Catholic while her fiancé’s family was Protestant, had specifically asked that the ceremony be performed as secular. She had apparently not consulted her mother-in-law on this decision, whose mouth had flattened into a line so thin her lips had almost disappeared. This passive-aggressive gesture could only stem from Midwestern breeding that both families possessed, but the bride had remained true to her convictions.

As of yet, the most memorable ceremony had been the one where the groom had paid her double to recite the speech from *The Princess Bride* (minus the speech impediment). From her first line, the entire party of groomsmen had to hide their sniggers with coughs, but she herself had

managed to keep a straight face through its entirety.

Maybe today *would* be different.

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“Are you going to do it?” Chase whispered to Jordan as they met in the basement of the event center. From the room behind him, he could hear the rest of the groomsmen laughing uproariously together.

“Oh god, it’s almost two! Why do you smell like booze?” Jordan whispered back, holding one hand over her nose and mouth. “Isn’t the ceremony in like half an hour?”

“I promise, I’ve sobered up.” Chase protested, drawing himself a bit and straightening his bowtie as if to prove that he was in total control of himself. “Can’t say the same about the rest of the groomsmen, though.” He trailed off for a second. “Wait, hey! Don’t avoid the question!”

“I’m not avoiding anything.” Jordan retorted, craning her neck to peer over Chase’s shoulder into the room with the groomsmen. “Shit, can I have what they’re having? Sounds like they’re having fun.”

“Jordan!” Chase hissed. “You told me you would last week when we went out!”

“I was also drunk. People say a lot of things they don’t mean when they’re drunk, Chase.

“Or, they say a lot of things that they DO mean but are too afraid to say when they’re sober.”

Jordan rolled her eyes at Chase’s fortune-cookie wisdom. “No, I’m not going to do it. I got over Maggie ages ago!”

It was Chase’s turn to roll his eyes, which spun like blue marbles in their sockets. “Yeah right. You’ve been in love with her since the first time you saw her at that frat party and you’ve never been able to get over her since. It’s written all over your face, Jordan. So why don’t you want to do it?!”

“Because we’re not characters in a telenovela? Is that a real question?”

Chase groaned and scratched his chin. Although freshly shaved, Chase’s black hair stood out so starkly beneath his pale skin, making it

seem like he already had a five o'clock shadow. "So you're just going to let the love of your life marry some...bland fuckboy?"

"I thought you and Kyle were friends?" Jordan asked, confused as to why Chase was so against their marriage. "I'm sure Maggie will be very happy with him. You did set them up, Mr. Matchmaker."

"Yeah, to get her some dick, not to get a ring on her finger! Look, Jordan. Kyle is a CPA. He golfs on the weekends. He thinks milk is spicy and plans on naming his son Kyle Jr. because he's not creative enough to think of another name. Probably his daughter, too. He'll have the whole George Foreman thing going on with his family." Chase's eyes ticked back and forth between hers. "Anyway, I'm digressing. That's the whiskey speaking. For me." He straightened himself up, adjusting the lapels of his navy-blue suit as he did so. "Jordan, really? Can you honestly look me in the eye and tell me that you think Maggie is doing this for her own happiness?"

Jordan bit her lip. She met Chase's gaze for as long as she could before she had to avert her gaze down to her shoes. "No, I don't."

"So are you going to do it, then?" Chase pressed, somewhat impatiently now.

Jordan groaned, exasperated. "Do you really think now is the best time? What kind of a person are you that you want me to ruin one of your best friend's wedding?"

Chase glanced around to see if anyone else from the bridal party had stumbled out of their respected rooms to listen in on their conversation. "Look, Jordan. The wedding party went down to the hotel bar last night, and Maggie did some tequila shots. You know how she gets when she's on tequila."

"Yeah, she pukes her guts out. That's how we all met, remember. She was puking into your brothers' kitchen sink, and you and I helped her get back to her dorm." Jordan replied, poking Chase playfully in his bicep. He ignored her attempts to distract him and continued.

"Yeah, well, long story short, I found her thirty minutes later on the floor of the ladies' room, crying and moaning your *name!*" Chase grabbed Jordan's shoulders excitedly and started bouncing up and down in his oxfords. "*Your* name, Jordan! She's still in love with you!"

Jordan opened her mouth to tell him to kindly fuck off, but he

talked over her. “Maggie is marrying Kyle because he’s got money and her parents will approve of her heteronormative lifestyle and all that jazz, but *she loves you Jordan! You gotta save her from herself!*” Chase was now practically jumping up and down in front of Jordan. “Jordan! Come on!”

“Let me get this straight,” Jordan pinched the bridge of her nose, feeling the beginning of a headache coming on. “You want me to interrupt a wedding because of some drunken ramblings by the bride?” When Chase didn’t answer, she looked up to see him nodding at her eagerly, getting the look of twinkling excitement in his eyes that he got every time he proposed a bad idea. That same look had preceded a rooftop escapade that nearly resulted in their arrest their senior year of college. “Chase, shit like this is why people say gays are so dramatic.”

“Jordannnnnnn!” Chase whined, stomping his feet like a toddler throwing a temper tantrum. “Jordan, please!” He pointed over Jordan’s shoulder towards the room where squeals from the bridesmaids could still be heard. “I promise you she’s already in that room doubting herself. If you stand up and tell her that you still love her, I promise you she’ll at least think about it, if not walk out of that church with you.”

Jordan wrenched her shoulder from Chase’s pincer-like grasp and rubbed where his nails had dug into her skin. “Chase, fuck off. I know you’re just messing with me.” Chase opened his mouth to protest, but Jordan cut him off. “If she’s so in love with me, why does she only make an effort to see me once a goddamn year, Chase?”

Chase groaned so loud that Jordan heard the groomsmen fall silent for a moment in their dressing room behind Chase. “Because she can’t bear to see you any more than that! It makes her feel guilty that she chose the heteronormative half of her bisexuality, and she can’t deal with those feelings!”

Jordan started backing away from Chase, shaking her head slowly. “I don’t know what Nicholas Sparks romance novel you’re stuck in, but there’s no way I’m falling for this ruse.”

Chase’s temper tantrum faded away to a look of sheer desperation. “Jordan, come on. I have a bad feeling about this marriage, and at this point I think only you will be able to talk her out of it.”

Jordan slowed to a halt. “Okay, but that still doesn’t explain why you want me to interrupt the wedding. Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?”

Chase shifted his weight from one foot to the other guiltily. “Because I forgot about her crying on the floor last night until just an hour ago. I was pretty blacked myself. Besides,” He pushed the left sleeve of his jacket up his forearm to check his watch. “The ceremony starts in five minutes. She’s probably already upstairs, surrounded by her bridesmaids and family. There’s no way you’ll be able to talk to her alone in time. It has to be during the ceremony.”

Jordan made a disgusted noise and spun around on her heel. As she headed towards the stairs, trying and failing to ignore Chase as he called after her, “Think about it! I know you will!”

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“When does the open bar start?” Jordan whispered to her friend Elise as the usher led them to their seats. Elise snorted. She, Maggie, Chase, and Jordan had all been friends during college, but after Jordan and Maggie’s breakup and Maggie’s subsequent romantic relationship with Chase’s friend Kyle, the once tight-knit quartet had fractured in two. Since they had drifted apart from Maggie in the past few years, Jordan and Elise had been left off the bridal party and had decided to attend the wedding together.

The room of the convention center had been transformed to resemble a church as much as it possibly could. Two rows of chairs flanked an aisle leading to a white altar covered in pink and yellow roses, whose perfume permeated the air. The afternoon sun flooded in through the high windows and skylights, illuminating the room and shrouding the entering guests in a golden glow. When closely inspected, the room contained many signs of a generic, corporate headquarters – mirrored tile, stackable chairs, a paint color a murky mix of blue and gray – but the detail put into the decoration masked the room’s intended purpose perfectly. It was beautiful, and as she studied her surroundings, Jordan knew Maggie had planned absolutely none of this wedding.

Once they had both been seated, Jordan’s friend Elsie studied her program. “*Mr. and Mrs. Kyle Wildthorne*,” She read quietly in a sing-song voice. “Ugh. That reminds me of that one Nickelodeon show...”

“The Wild Thornberrys!” Jordan said excitedly, causing the woman sitting in front of her to give her the side-eye.

Elsie snapped her fingers. “Yes!”

“Oh god, I’m going to make so many jokes about that one to her,” Jordan smirked, scanning over her own program. She held the paper up to her face and inhaled the faint scent of perfume embedded in the stationary. The inclusion of this seemingly minor detail confirmed Jordan’s suspicions: Maggie had helped plan very little of this ceremony.

Elsie snickered. “What, at your once-yearly obligatory coffee date?”

Jordan stopped smirking, and Elsie’s eyes widened, quickly realizing that she had hit a nerve. Flustered, she began to apologize. “I didn’t mean—“

Jordan realized she didn’t want to hear it before her friend had even begun, and turned back to staring at her program without actually reading it. “No, forget it.”

“She doesn’t talk to me much anymore either—“ Elsie tried to continue, but Jordan cut her off again.

“I said forget it.”

The two sat in an awkward silence for a while. Jordan watched the other friends and family taking their seats and Elsie scrolled through her Instagram feed on her phone. As more people filed in, the temperature in the room rose steadily. Jordan began to fan herself with her program, causing the ends of her dark bob to flutter around her cheeks. Next to her, Elsie used her free hand to lift her blonde hair off her neck.

“What’s the hashtag we’re supposed to use?” Elsie asked after a minute, breaking the tension that hung between them as heavy as the scents of pollen and women’s perfume quickly filling the room.

Jordan looked at her program for the answer. “#TheWildThornberrys.”

“Wait, seriously?” Elsie asked, looking up from her phone.

Jordan snorted and smacked Elsie’s knee with her program playfully. “No, but I wish.”

The pianist started hammering out Pachelbel’s *Canon in D*, and the parents of the groom began to meander down the aisle.

“Psst, Jordan.” Elsie hissed in her ear. “Chase told me you were going to—“

Jordan cut her off with a look, and her friend remained silent as the rest of the wedding party came down the aisle and took their places at the front of the room. The youngest bridesmaid – evidently the sister of the groom – seemed to be leaning heavily on the groomsman who walked down the aisle with her.

When the groom arrived, Elsie again hissed in Jordan's ear. "If you layered every white college frat boy's face on top of each other, you would get his face. That's how generic it is."

Jordan stifled a laugh and kicked Elsie's foot with her own to get her to be quiet. An old lady seated in a row in front of them turned around and gave them the stink eye.

Suddenly, the music changed, and Jordan's heart sank; this was the part she had been dreading. The guests all stood up at their seats, and Jordan reluctantly followed suit.

Maggie's dress was pure white, an irony so outdated that Jordan figured no one else in the seats was thinking about. The dress was long-sleeved and lacy, a style that Jordan figured Maggie had adopted to cover up her rose tattoo on her right shoulder, a somewhat impulsive decision made on her 20th birthday. Jordan convinced herself that she could see its outline through the lace, although she might have simply been tricking her own brain because she knew it was there. Coincidentally, that rose tattoo matched the pink roses Maggie clutched in her hand.

After a minute, Jordan realized that she had been holding her breath. After seven years, Maggie had remained in Jordan's eyes the epitome of ideal beauty. Her auburn curls, her golden-green eyes, the way one side of her mouth rose higher than the other when she smiled. But it wasn't just her physical beauty that had captivated Jordan. There were very few people in the world that Jordan truly felt comfortable around, and Maggie was one of them. She had been the first and only person Jordan had said "I love you" to and meant it.

Tearing her gaze away from Maggie, Jordan glanced up at the altar to gauge Kyle's reaction. He was smiling— somewhat blandly in her opinion — at his bride coming towards him down the aisle, flanked by both her mother and her father. Jordan's hand began to shake with the program still clutched in them, the stock paper now wrinkled and sweaty from her prolonged grasp. Why weren't tears streaming down his face? Why wasn't he down on his knees, worshipping her for marrying

him? Hell, Jordan would be if she were in his place. Instead, he was just smirking at her like she was another spreadsheet he needed to tackle.

Jordan avoided Chase's glare, electing to watch Maggie give her bouquet to her Maid of Honor and take Kyle's hands in her own. The officiant was dressed entirely in black, mostly so she would look professional and not compete with the bride. But Jordan thought that her outfit choice was fitting at this moment.

I should have pregamed this, Jordan thought, tuning out the droning voice of the officiant. *That bridesmaid had the right idea.*

"...anyone have a reason why these two should not be wed, speak now or forever hold your peace."

In that split second, the entire room seemed to hold its breath simultaneously. Chase (in a manner not the least bit subtle) whipped his head around to glare at Jordan again so fast, Jordan could swear she heard his neck crack from the eighth row. Next to her, Elsie shifted her foot so it pressed hard against her own. In a second that seemed to stretch for an eternity, she hesitated.

Finished with her routine sweep of the room to see if anyone had jumped up to protest the marriage, the officiant opened her mouth to continue her ceremony. From her seat, Jordan saw the officiant's chest expand with her inhalation, and in that moment Jordan knew it was then or it was never.

"Maggie!"

There was a collective gasp and every head in the room (except Chase's) swiveled in her direction. Jordan was as surprised as anyone that she had spoken up, and she was equally surprised to suddenly find herself standing up. She swayed a little and grabbed onto the back of the chair in front of her.

"Maggie, I—" "Shit, she hadn't rehearsed anything in her head. From the front of the room, Maggie's mother-in-law fainted, distracting the first two rows and much of the bridal party from Jordan's outburst.

Maggie stared back, her hands still clutching (a now very confused) Kyle's, her mouth agape and eyes unblinking.

Void of any prepared material, Jordan said the first words that came to her mind. This was not a good idea.

“A fucking accountant, Maggie? Really?” There were gasps from the audience at Jordan’s use of profanity. “You said you’d love me forever. You told me that the night you got your tattoo.” Maggie’s mother-in-law, who had come back to consciousness, heard the word “tattoo” and immediately slumped over again. Jordan hoped that she stayed down for a while otherwise what Jordan was about to say next might just kill her.

“Maggie, I love you. You and I...we just *clicked*, you know? You’re the only one I’ve ever truly loved, and I know you still have feelings for me too.” *Dammit, Chase, you’d better be right about this.*

It was at this moment Kyle intervened. He stepped in front of Maggie and said in a tight voice, “She’s marrying me. I think it’s best for you to leave.”

“I think it’s best for you to fuck off, Kyle. Maybe go off and start looking for the clitoris because I know you’ve never been able to find it before.” The entire audience gasped again, and Jordan now noticed that many in the audience had begun to fan themselves anxiously with their programs.

If the thought of a raging lesbian professing her undying love for her future daughter-in-law hadn’t finished her off, that last remark had surely killed Maggie’s mother-in-law. In the line of groomsmen, Chase let out a whoop of support and appreciation, and Elsie mimicked him, giving Jordan the strength she needed to continue.

“You think this prick will ever be able to love you like I do? You think you’ll ever be able to love him like you love me? Please, don’t choose security over happiness for once in your goddamn life,” Jordan said, now edging out of the row and into the aisle where she could look at Maggie head-on. “Some people you just never get over, Maggie, and for me, that’s you.” Jordan stepped forward a row so that Maggie would hopefully be able to see how sincere and earnest her expression was. “Maggie... Magdalena...please.”

Maggie still hadn’t said anything, not a good sign. Jordan swallowed hard, her throat catching. She didn’t know if she’d be able to say anything more herself.

Kyle certainly could. “Now listen here, you —” Kyle uttered a word that would surely make his mother rise from her early grave and smack him ‘round the ears. The audience gasped again – surely all the air from the room had been sucked up by them because Jordan certainly

couldn't breathe – and Kyle's groomsmen started to stir restlessly, waiting for a word from Kyle to escort Jordan from the building. Kyle continued:

“I knew that Maggie had...*experimented* in college,” Kyle spat this word out like it was something vile, “But I can assure you that it was just a phase. She loves me now, and I think it best for you to leave.”

Jordan looked pleadingly at Maggie, who had remained mute throughout this entire ordeal. Maggie's mouth opened and closed like a dead fish, and then her eyes clouded over with an emotion that Jordan recognized as pity. With that, Jordan's heart sank and she knew her cause was lost. It was the same look that Maggie had given her when they had broken up four years ago.

“Jordan...” Maggie began, stepping in front of Kyle and fumbling her hands together. “Jordan, you know I love you too,” Maggie's voice cracked, and tears began to form in her eyes, threatening to destroy her perfectly made-up face. Jordan knew what word was coming next from Maggie's mouth: “But—“

That's when Jordan knew: Chase may have been right about Maggie's feelings, but she would never be able to admit that she was still in love with Jordan, especially not in front of all these people. Although Maggie would love the drama of leaving Kyle at the altar for a woman, her loyalty to her conservative family was what caused her to hesitate, her mouth opening and closing like a fish, unable to form the words that her heart so desperately wanted her to.

Jordan held up one hand, saving Maggie from making the speech she knew was coming. Desperate to maintain some semblance of dignity, she drew herself up to her full height (an unimpressive 5'6") and looked Kyle squarely in the eye.

“I will love her more than you ever will be able to, but she chose you,” At this, Maggie covered her hand with her mouth, and her shoulders began to shake. Jordan continued. “Many blessings upon you both.”

With that, Jordan shuffled her way through the row of chairs and marched down the aisle, her head held high. The wedding guests still stirred, and behind her she could hear the officiant calling for order to resume in the hall, not unlike a judge would call to order in a courtroom.

Thankfully, the tears came once she was outside in her car, burying her face in her steering wheel.

After about fifteen minutes of hysterical sobbing, there came a tap on her car window. Before she raised her head, exposing her makeup-smearred face to whoever it was, she mentally ran through the options of who it could be: Elsie and/or Chase to come check on her, Kyle and his cronies to beat her up, or Maggie, sweet Maggie, with her auburn hair and her crooked smile, here to comfort her and admit—out of the scrutinizing eyes of her friends and family—that she, too, loved her.

Instead, it was Kyle's sister, the drunk bridesmaid who had needed to be supported by a groomsman down the aisle. Confused, Jordan rolled down her window to see what she wanted.

"Um, hey," the girl began somewhat lamely. "You don't know me, but I thought that was pretty ballsy what you did in there. I'm Alyssa, by the way." The girl held out her hand for Jordan to shake. After blinking at the bridesmaid for a moment, Jordan stuck her hand through the car window to shake Alyssa's hand.

"Well, anyway...I think that it was awesome that you went after the girl you loved like that. Maggie is a pretty special girl and..." Alyssa sighed longingly.

Jordan couldn't believe it. Was everyone at that fucking wedding in love with Maggie?! "You're in love with her too?"

Alyssa threw her head back and laughed. Evidently, not all the wine had worn off yet. "Yeah...you know that feeling when you just...I don't know...click with someone? That's how I felt with Maggie. Everyone must feel that way though, apparently."

The more Jordan looked at her, the more she could see how Alyssa was obviously Kyle's sister. However, the features that were so bland on him had been softened by her femininity and enhanced by the makeup she wore, making her really quite pretty. Alyssa fidgeted, fiddling with the ribbon on her bouquet of pink roses.

"So...since now I know you're single..." The girl handed a slip of paper through the window. "That's my number. I'm busy tonight, obviously, but you should call me."

