

He had no idea there was no way I'd have left when he'd promised to come talk to me. "That was nice of her." Thank god my voice didn't squeak again. I managed to get my mocha to my lips and drink.

"Yeah, she's a nice person. Can I sit down?"

I nodded, and he slid into the chair next to mine, took the lid off his coffee, lifted it to his lips, and drank, then set it down. His sleeves were rolled up so I could see his muscles as he moved, and the hair on his arms caught the light and shone. I couldn't take my eyes away from him.

"So, you want to know about gay bars?"

I could feel I was turning red. How could he say that so casually? "Well, yes."

"I could give you some addresses and opinions, but the better way would be for me to take you to some. How about tonight? I'm here till eight."

He wanted to take me to gay bars? And he wanted to go tonight? Wow. That was fast. I hadn't bargained on that, but it would be stupid of me to turn down such a generous offer.

"Thank you. That's nice of you." It would be easier not going alone, although I'd bet he'd get all of the attention. But maybe that would be best for my first time. I could watch him and the other men interact and figure out later what I'd feel comfortable doing and which bar I'd feel comfortable doing it at. Then the next time I'd go by myself and maybe even find someone.

"Nope, not nice at all." He stared right at me, smile gone. "If you go by yourself to any gay bar I know, some smart guy'll scoop you up and I'll never get a chance with you."

"You want a chance with me?" How? He'd just met me. I wasn't repulsive, but I wasn't handsome like him. He could get any guy he wanted, I was sure of that. Was he just being nice? It was likely. Or he was just trying to bolster my confidence. I needed a minute to decide what to do next, so I reached for my coffee,

then stopped when I felt how my hands were shaking. He reached over and took them in his. I liked how warm and strong his fingers felt.

“Yeah, I do.” He frowned and looked down at his coffee. “But hey, if that’s not good for you, fine. I’ll give you some addresses and some tips if you want them. It’s just, you smiled at me, and I thought, hey, he looks interesting and interested and really cute, so I’ll see what comes out of it if I make a move.”

He started to pull his hands away, but I wouldn’t let go. “No, that sounds fine. I’d like you with me.” I didn’t recognize my voice, all husky and needy, but he was looking at me again, and I liked that. “How about dinner first?” I didn’t know if I was going to drink or not at whatever bar he took me to, but it made sense to have something in my stomach. And dinner with him would be like a date.

His smile came back. “I like that idea.” He squeezed my hands, then let go, and this time I let him. “You gonna hang around here or come back? Or do you want me to meet you somewhere else?”

I glanced at my watch to see that it was six-thirty. “I’ll stay here.” Maybe I’d get another mocha. I had books to read after all, and no reason to travel home and then back again.

“Wish I could leave now, but I can’t.” His voice was husky too. “I hope the time goes by fast, David.”

“Me too, Jamie.”

“You know my name?” He sounded surprised.

“It’s right there on your name tag. You know, the one you’re wearing on a red cord around your neck.” I couldn’t help smiling.

He laughed. “Right, so it is. What an ultramaroon.” He stood. “Time to get back to work.”

“Don’t work too hard, Jamie. I’ll be here, waiting for you.” I smiled and hoped he took my comments as the flirting I meant them to be.

His green eyes gleamed, and I decided that yes, I’d managed to get my point across for once. “Don’t worry

about that. I'll make sure to do easy stuff. I don't think my brain's working as well as it usually does. Got this cute guy on my mind instead of inventory and barcodes." He put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed. "Look through your books and see if there's anything you want to try out—sorry, shouldn't assume—ask me about later," he said softly, then lifted his hand and headed back to the store.

My shoulder was tingling, and I couldn't stop smiling. What a great idea. I'd make a list, and maybe I would get to try something out with him.

I made a short list and read it over while I drank the rest of my decaf mocha, then ordered a plain decaf. I liked coffee and chocolate together, but one was enough.

The list sounded stupid. I hadn't done anything, I was an ignorant idiot, and Jamie would figure that out as soon as we talked for more than a few minutes and want nothing more to do with me.

Well, I could fix this. I'd write a note for him, saying I'd changed my mind, leave it with someone else, get out of there. He'd shrug and never give me another thought and find someone else. I wouldn't come here again. There were other bookstores I could go to.

What was I doing? I'd told myself I'd stop being a coward.

I took a deep breath. I'd wanted a guy for years and years and years and now that I'd found one who wanted me too, I was going to run away? Hell no. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to see what might happen with Jamie. I'd come this far, so why not keep going? All I had to do was stay, so I'd stay.

I stood and reached for the empty coffee cups and napkins to throw them away. Being courageous was hard. But it was more rewarding than being scared all the time.

"Hey, David. Are you going to be hungry for dinner after all that coffee?"

It was him, smiling at me again, and I was glad I'd decided to stay.

I smiled too. "Yes. Does pizza sound good to you?"

His smile broadened. "Yeah, and I know a great place. We can either walk there or take the T."

"I'd rather walk." It had been warm enough this morning that I'd decided not to bring a jacket with me, and it was June, so it wasn't going to be cold now.

"Good. I like walking." He gestured toward the store. "I'd better get back to work. I'm shelving books. Hope I'm putting them in the right places."

"I hope so too." I reached out and touched his hand. "You'll be done soon?"

"Yeah."

"That's good news." My voice was huskier than I'd ever heard it. "I'll read a little more."

"Yeah, you do that." His voice was husky too, and he looked at me like he'd like to throw me down and kiss me or something. No one had ever looked at me like that before. "Too bad I wore these brand new jeans today. Anyone can tell I'm turned on."

Of course I glanced down, then flushed. God, those jeans were tight!

He laughed softly. "Sorry. Couldn't resist. I really will go now."

And he turned away, flashing me one more smile, and went back to the store.

I sat down again. I'd have to wait until I wasn't so hard to use the restroom. Right now it would be no use at all.

It did not help that I couldn't take my eyes off his ass. Wow. I really wanted to see him out of those jeans, and that shirt, and find out how his skin felt and tasted, and feel his hands on me...

Definitely not the time to open any of my new books.

Still looking at Jamie's ass, I made myself think of one number, then another, then a third, and added them, then added another, and so forth. Numbers. They'd

help me get myself back under control.

It was forty-five long minutes before he was finished, and I was more than ready to leave when he showed up again with that drop-dead gorgeous smile.

“Okay, let’s get out of here.” He took off his name tag and stuffed it into his shirt pocket, then slung the jacket he was carrying over his shoulder. “You still want pizza?”

“Yes, if it’s good pizza.”

“It’s really good pizza. Great vegetarian choices too, if that’s how you go.”

I shook my head. I liked meat just fine, and I wasn’t that picky. I just wanted some food, and then we’d go to at least one gay bar, and then...I didn’t know. Would he suggest we go to his place? Would he want to go to mine? Would he see some good looking guy at the bar and decide he could do much, much better than me?

“Hey.” His hand was on my shoulder again, and it felt warm and reassuring. “You’re freaking out, right?”

It must be written all over my face, not that I was surprised. I wasn’t good at hiding anything. I nodded.

“Don’t. We’ll have some pizza. We’ll talk there. Then we’ll have a drink or two at this quiet bar I know, at least it’s quiet during the week.” He gave me a small smile. “I don’t know what then. I mean, I know what I’d like—you in my bed—but I don’t know if that’ll be right for you. Maybe next time, if you give me a next time.”

He wanted me in his bed? He was worried about *me* giving him a next time? What did he see in me? And did I really care considering I was getting everything I could have ever hoped for? Hell no. I was finding it hard to breathe, but I managed to speak. “Okay. We’ll see how it goes. And a next time sounds good to me.” But maybe he wouldn’t want it after this time. Still, he’d said it, and that counted for something.

I couldn’t help looking at his jeans again. Yes, he was erect again, or was it still?