

## Chapter 4

“Very well, Sir, your man will be there at 7:00pm. Have a good day.” Jeremy said to the phone before replacing it on its wired base. A difficult customer, this man, he thought, a guest at the hotel where Jeremy worked. It would be one for Max, he thought.

He picked up his cell phone and browsed the directory for Max’s number. He knew it from memory, but felt it was easier to go to the letter M on his phone. He also knew that Max would not answer his personal phone while working at the café, so he prepared himself to leave a message.

“Hey Max, Jeremy here. I have a customer whom I think only you can handle best, tonight 7 pm at the hotel, let me know if you can do it. Also, I need to tell you a few things about him, he’s a bit special. Alright? Call me ASAP.”

Max was Jeremy’s favorite among the “tour guides” he hired for his “tour company.” In reality, Jeremy found male companions for visiting businessmen, but all arrangements were coded as if the businessmen hired a private guide to visit San Francisco, to take them to restaurants and shows. This way he could have a completely legitimate business, pay his contractors, bill his clients (he accepted American Express), file taxes. He didn’t care if the charges ended up on an expense report or was part of an employee’s per diem allowance, but he was sure that it would never be called anything like escort services, or massage, which was still a euphemism despite the legitimacy of therapeutic massage (the latter he arranged as part of his regular concierge services).

And truthfully he once estimated that only 10% of his company’s billed hours included sexual activity, unlike the escort services for straight men who rarely needed anything but a quick intercourse. His clients wanted a full San Francisco experience, which often included walking down Castro Street holding hands with another man, and multi-course dinners at trendy restaurants. Yet the clients required utmost discretion, as they often had a wife waiting for them wherever home could be. His guides loved Japanese men in particular, who treated them as if they were at a tea ceremony, and who talked very little about themselves or “gay life” as something they could attain some day. At the other end of the scale were Midwesterners who wanted a gay life but lamented they would have to leave wife, children, and career behind.

Jeremy himself was straight, but had a good sense of what closeted gay men needed. His younger brother was gay and now an actor on Broadway, and Jeremy had developed a particular sensitivity for the gay world. He had often misled others into thinking he himself was gay, which he often took as a compliment, even though he knew you could find just as many slobs per gay capita as per straight capita. Slobs, he thought, were predominant among the general population and were, by the law of numbers, perceived as the straight man’s norm.

He had started the business from the realization that while he knew the answer to every hotel guest’s request, the best drivers, hairdressers, florists, ticket vendors, restaurateurs of all kinds, he knew nothing about male escorts. He predicted that in the next year or so, he would expand his clientele to include women in need of non-sexual male company (or again, that the 10% would apply there too, and that many of his guides could manage very well with women).

He wasn't sure if and how he could expand to offer female escorts specifically for women clients. He wasn't sure he understood the world of women as well as he could understand the world of all men.

Max called while Jeremy was dealing with a group of businessmen who wanted tickets to Beach Blanket Babylon. The voice mail, Jeremy hoped, would give him a positive answer, but Jeremy needed to talk to Max in order to explain about the client. He was blind. Jeremy had seen him arrive the day before, expertly led to the reception desk by the chief doorman as if he were royalty. All personnel at the hotel received training on how to serve disabled guests, and at the end of the day it was just common sense (do not tell a blind person where the restroom is just by pointing at it), but Jeremy didn't know how dating worked in the blind world.

"That's fine with me," said Max when they could finally talk.

"I just want you to be comfortable with it," said Jeremy. "I suppose he'll tell you what he needs, just like everybody. I suppose he'll feel your face to figure how beautiful you are. You know? Like in the movies."

"That can be quite exciting," said Max. "I may want to blindfold all clients after that."

"Don't you start having wild ideas, now. Seven o'clock, room 1453. It's on the Premier floor, so you'll need to register at the desk. You know how."

"Yes, no problem Jeremy. Thank you. I like the challenge."

"I knew you would. You always take the most challenging cases."

After hanging up, Jeremy reflected on what he had just said. What would he do once Max figured out he should take a better position, more stable, and more, perhaps, honorable? Something requiring a Ph.D., or anything Max wished for. The world would be a better place, one side of Jeremy's brain told him. Maybe Max would become a civil rights lawyer, and win difficult cases defending gay marriage, the transgender, other minorities of course, and the poor. His stint as a male companion would serve to pay for his studies, but probably show up against him, should he run for office. Max wasn't a politician, Jeremy told himself. He was too genuine to be a politician.

"OK, Jeremy," he said out loud, taking himself out of his reverie, and reaching for a notepad on his desk, "on with dinner reservations."

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Max hung up and put his phone in his back pocket. He was cold in the little courtyard at the back of the café, the only place where one could take a break in peace. Happy to have another client lined up for tonight, he was hopeful that he would soon make enough money every month to get his own place, instead of subletting a room from Paul. Yet with the housing

situation in San Francisco, and particularly in and around the Castro, he would probably not find a place to call his own very easily.

He imagined his own place, where he could entertain guests, and yet he had no friends to invite. He only needed one, he thought. Far from him was the idea that he could have a boyfriend, an LTR – Long Term Relationship. He had grown to resent being seen with a boyfriend, for someone would inevitably see them and make a big deal out of it, which would inevitably become a big deal with his parents. And such baggage he brought with him to San Francisco, where logically every gay person should feel suddenly liberated and instantly coupled with the ideal boyfriend... Instead he found a day job serving rich people their daily double decaf non-fat latte, and a part-time job serving visitors their illusions of gay life in San Francisco. He could not imagine becoming one of them, those closeted men who had chosen a life where they could be like everyone else, and yet needed to find themselves in their secret fantasy world. They needed to find jobs that would require frequent travel to a gay mecca in order to live a double life, like the straight men who had two wives and two sets of children, one in Asia and one in the US. What were they thinking?

Max took a deep breath of fresh air before returning to the coffee infused air inside. He was looking forward to meeting his new client tonight. It would be different, and make his job interesting, which represented more to him than having the perfect, unattainable life.