

# MAYBE NEXT YEAR



A Novel

DAVE HUGHES

A sample chapter from

# MAYBE NEXT YEAR

A novel  
by Dave Hughes

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## Gay Pride Day

Saturday, June 2, 2007

On Saturday morning, Chris pulled into Bryan's driveway at 10:00 sharp.

Bryan kissed his mom goodbye. "We'll grab lunch out somewhere."

She replied, "Please try to eat sensibly. And be back in plenty of time for dinner. Have fun."

Bryan hurried out and got in the car.

Chris pulled out of the driveway and headed east toward the Missouri state line.

Three of their favorite used record stores were located within a few blocks of each other in downtown Kansas City, so Chris found a convenient parking spot and they hit them all. They were in music nirvana as they thumbed through the endless bins of new and used records and CDs. They completely lost track of time.

They emerged from the third store at around 12:30. Bryan asked, "What do you want to do for lunch? I am starving."

"How about Bateman's Barbecue? There's one down on Main Street, near Linwood."

"Let's do it."

As they drove south on Main Street, they passed the World War I Museum and Park. There was some sort of event going on, with brightly colored balloons tied together to form large arches.

Bryan said, "Hmmm... I wonder what's going on."

Chris replied, "Judging from all those rainbow-colored balloons, it's probably some sort of gay festival."

They continued to Bateman's Barbecue, where they feasted on pulled pork sandwiches slathered with Kansas City's famous barbecue sauce, onion rings, and barbecue beans. They talked non-stop about everything they had found in the record stores and what they'd like to listen to first.

As they were walking back out to the car, Chris said, "Hey. We have time. Let's go check out the festival."

Bryan wasn't that interested, but he could tell Chris wanted to. "Okay. For a little while."

Chris drove back up Main Street and parked the car a couple of blocks from the festival. Other people were walking toward the festival, making a wide range of fashion statements.

Bryan glanced over at Chris. "You planned this, didn't you?"

“It was merely a coincidence that this was right on our way.”

As they approached the entrance, they heard someone yelling into a PA system. They saw a cluster of people, mostly men, standing behind a crowd-control barricade holding signs. They weren't close enough to be able to read them.

As they got closer, they were able to make out what the speaker was saying more clearly. He was ranting about how God hates homosexuals, using extremely vulgar and obnoxious language.

Bryan froze. Chris took his hand and tried to lead him on. “C’mon, just ignore them.”

“We have to go back.” Bryan broke free of Chris’s hand and turned away.

“Oh, come on. They’re just haters. Ignore them.”

“Some of them might be from my church.”

A couple of men were passing by at that moment. One of them said to Bryan, “Unless your church is in Lincoln, Nebraska, it’s highly unlikely.”

The other one said, “They’re from the Eastlawn Baptist Church in Lincoln. They’re here every year. Next weekend they’ll be at a Gay Pride Day somewhere else. They do this all over the country, all year long.”

“But why?” Chris asked.

“Because they’re homophobic assholes who don’t have anything better to do with their lives. Can’t you feel the love of God flowing out of them?”

The first one said, “Honey, just walk right past them. Don’t give them a reaction. That’s what they want. Just totally ignore them. And whatever you do, do not make eye contact.”

And with that, the two men resumed walking to the festival.

Chris turned to Bryan, “Okay now, come on. Ignore them. Just walk right on past. Don’t let them get to you.”

Bryan hesitantly walked with Chris past the protesters. He glanced in their direction. The man with the microphone saw that and pounced. He proceeded to spew invectives aimed directly at Bryan and Chris. Chris grabbed Bryan’s hand and pulled him on.

Once they were inside the festival and out of earshot of the protesters, Bryan asked, “Can we sit down somewhere?”

They found a tree and sat down on the ground in the shade. Chris put his arm around Bryan. “Put it behind you. Like that guy said, they’re trying to get a reaction from you. Don’t give it to them. They just want to make you miserable. Don’t give them the satisfaction.”

“But... what if they’re right? What if being gay really is wrong?”

Chris debated what to say next. He hadn’t been to church in years, so he was at a distinct disadvantage. “Think about how Jesus spoke to his followers. Do you think he talked to them that way?”

“Well, no.”

“Was that the type of message he preached?”

“No.”

“Besides, who made them the official messengers of God, anyway?”

Bryan had no answer for that.

“Right. Nobody. So, there’s no reason you should listen to them or believe them. They are ... what are they called? ... oh, yeah ... false prophets. Forget about it.”

Bryan remained silent a few moments longer. Then he said, “Yeah. You’re right.” He stood up. “Okay, I’m doing better now. Thanks.”

Chris stood up and hugged Bryan. “Okay, let’s take a look around.”

Bryan and Chris walked around among the booths of various organizations and businesses. There were booths for LGBT employee organizations at some of the area’s corporate employers, and booths for gay realtors, insurance agents, sports teams, and social clubs. They were amazed that there were so many LGBT organizations and businesses in Kansas City.

They stopped at a T-shirt vendor and Chris began looking through their merchandise. There were rainbow-colored designs and messages of all sorts. He spotted one shirt he liked and held it up to show Bryan. It read, ‘I’m not gay but my boyfriend is’ above an arrow pointing to the left. Other shirts with the same message had an arrow pointing to the right. “Check this out! We could each wear one of these with the arrow pointing at the other one!”

“No,” Bryan replied firmly.

“Oh, come on. I’ll pay for them.”

“No. Where would we wear them, anyway?”

“I dunno. Maybe at the mall or something.”

“Not under any circumstances.”

“Maybe next year at college.” Chris picked out two larges, one with a left arrow and one with a right arrow.

“There is no way I am bringing that into my house.”

“I’ll hang on to it until next year.”

Bryan gave up. Whatever – it was his money.

Chris picked out a couple of other rainbow T-shirts for himself.

Bryan said, “You can’t wear any of those when you come to my house. Ever.”

“Okay, okay. Take a chill pill. Geez.”

Chris paid for the shirts and they moved on.

Next, they stopped at the booth for the Kansas City LGBT Community Center. Chris turned to Bryan and said, “Look! They have an LGBT youth group called Pathways. They meet every week. We should go check it out.” Chris picked up a couple of flyers and signed himself up for their email list. Bryan didn’t want to dampen Chris’s enthusiasm, so he said nothing. Chris could go by himself if he wanted to.

They passed a booth for the KC Leather Lords, staffed by a few tough-looking men wearing various types of leather harnesses, vests, and chaps.

They stopped at a booth for the Kansas City Equality Alliance, or KC-EQ for short. Chris signed up for their email list too.

Next, they passed a booth for an LGBT band. Chris lit up. “Look! They even have a gay band we could join!”

Bryan replied, “When? We’ll be busy with everything going on at school. Then after that, we’ll be going someplace else to college.”

“We could at least go to their concerts.” Chris approached the booth and started chatting with one of the band members. “I can’t believe you have a gay band here. What do you do?”

“We rehearse every Thursday night and we perform three or four concerts per year.”

“Sweet!” Chris signed up for their email list.

Another band member joined the conversation. “And then sometimes we travel to other cities where they have LGBT bands and play with them, like St. Louis.”

Chris got more excited, if that was possible. “You mean there’s an LGBT band in every city?”

“There’s like fifteen or twenty scattered around the country.”

“That’s awesome! Thanks!”

As they turned to walk away, Chris said to Bryan, “See? There might be a gay band wherever we end up.”

They wandered over to the food truck area. Someone was selling cherry lemonades. Bryan bought two larges and gave one to Chris.

They could hear music coming from somewhere, so they headed in the direction it was coming

from. On a portable stage, a 20-something lesbian with an acoustic guitar and a mullet was passionately singing what was probably an original song – something about sisterhood, freedom, and world peace. When she finished, she received an enthusiastic round of applause from her devoted followers. Then a drag queen came onstage to make announcements and tell jokes while the next act was setting up.

Bryan glanced at his watch. “We should probably get going pretty soon.”

Chris was having a great time and probably would have stayed until the festival closed. “Maybe another half hour?”

“Okay.”

They wandered down another row of booths. Chris pulled Bryan over to one of them. “Bryan – there’s a gay church!”

This was a revelation to Bryan. A church for gay people? That would be heresy to his dad. Chris picked up a brochure. “We should check it out sometime.”

“You forget that I have to work at my church every Sunday morning.”

“Couldn’t you get a week off?”

“What would be the point? I couldn’t start going regularly. And you don’t even go to church.”

Chris decided he should change the subject. “So, what do you do at your church anyway?”

“Well, for the past two years, I’ve been the webmaster. Remember a couple of summers ago I took that course in website design at the community college? After that, I rebuilt the church’s website. Now I keep it up-to-date with upcoming events, special services, announcements, that sort of thing. Then each Saturday I put together the PowerPoint we show during the services on Sunday morning. Then during the services, I run it.”

Chris looked puzzled. “You show PowerPoint slides at church?” It had been years since his family attended church, but he couldn’t imagine why they would need PowerPoint at church.

“Yeah. And I usually run the sound. Another guy records the service on video, then I post it on the website afterward.”

“Would you show me sometime? I’d like to see what it is you do.”

“Sure. How about tonight?”

“Okay. My parents are going out tonight, so they won’t care. Hey, maybe after we do that, you could come over and we could listen to some of the stuff we bought today.”

“Cool. I’ll have to ask, but I probably can.”

Then they passed the booth for the Parents Support Network, a group for parents of LGBT kids.



Chris walked up to it and Bryan followed.

Chris said, “This group could be useful when you come out to your parents.”

“Which would be never.”

“Well, what if they find out anyway?” Chris picked up a brochure and shoved it in Bryan’s hand. “Here, take this. Just have it in case you ever need it.”

“I won’t need it if I’m dead.”

“Oh, please.”

A gentle, friendly-looking older lady approached Bryan and Chris. “Hi, I’m Ruth Ann. Are you enjoying the festival?”

Chris replied, “Totally! This is our first time. I never knew there was so much stuff.”

“Yes, Kansas City has a much more vibrant community than you might think.”

“So, what does your group do?”

“We meet twice a month at a local church. Mostly, we just talk. We provide support to parents who are still coming to terms with having a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning child. We share our stories of how we dealt with hearing the news and how we grew into acceptance and support for our children. Usually, the parents take comfort in knowing they’re not alone and other parents have gone through what they are experiencing. We try to provide a welcoming space for them to ask questions and express their feelings and emotions.”

Chris replied, “Sweet!”

Ruth Ann asked, “Do your parents know about you?”

Chris replied, “I came out to my folks last weekend. They were pretty cool with it. They had kind of figured it out anyway.”

“Well, that’s wonderful. You’re very fortunate.”

Bryan spoke up. “I’m not so fortunate. My dad’s the pastor at a very conservative Christian church. There’s no way I can come out to them. He’d either kick me out or kill me.”

Ruth Ann’s face showed a genuine look of concern. “What about your mother?”

“She might not be quite as bad, but there’s no way she would go against my father.”

“Dear, your mother probably already knows. Or at least it has occurred to her. My son came out to me when he was twenty-seven. I knew when he was five.”

Bryan furrowed his brow. Not *his* mother.

Ruth Ann continued, “Your mother carried you inside her for nine months. She knows you more

deeply than you realize. She observes you and thinks about you constantly. Mothers have intuition about these sorts of things.”

“Maybe so. But if she suspects I’m gay, I’m sure she prays for God to take it away every single day.”

“We’ve had a lot of parents who reacted badly at first, but then they came around. I have witnessed some amazing transformations.”

Bryan tried to smile. “It would take a miracle.”

Ruth Ann smiled back. “Well, keep us in mind if your parents find out. And good luck, sweetheart.”

Chris sensed that Bryan was ready to leave. “Thank you, Ruth Ann!”

“You’re welcome, dear.”

They headed back toward the entrance of the festival. Bryan was dreading another encounter with the protesters. Thankfully, they had packed up and left.

Bryan was silent during their walk back to the car. Chris was yammering on about all the things they had discovered and experienced. A whole new gay world had opened up for Chris, and he was eager to become a part of it.

As they began the drive home, Chris turned to Bryan. “So, what did you think?”

Bryan took a moment to compose his thoughts and select the words he wanted to use.

“It was okay. It’s great that they have all these groups and everything, but it all seems out of reach for me.”

“How come?”

“Well, they have a gay church, but I can’t go to it. They have a gay youth group, but I can’t go to it. They have a gay band, but I can’t play in it. I mean, where would I tell Mom I’m going each week? They have a parents’ support group, but my folks would never go. It’s like being in a big candy store and being told you can’t have any candy.”

“I thought you would enjoy being around people like you.”

“But that’s just it. Those people aren’t like me. I didn’t feel like I belonged there at all. I don’t want to be a drag queen. I have no desire to wear leather stuff. I don’t want to swish around and call other guys ‘honey’ and ‘gurrll.’ I don’t need to wear rainbow clothes or have other people know about my private life.”

Chris said nothing. Bringing Bryan to the gay pride festival had been a terrible idea.

Bryan continued, “And besides, why do I need to attach a label to myself? Why do I need to join some community? You keep talking about me coming out to my parents. I don’t see why I need to come out to anybody. I don’t see why I need to identify myself one way or another. Why can’t I just be me?”

“So, you’re not even willing to say you’re gay?”

“And if you’ll notice, I haven’t.”

“Well, then what about us? What are we? What am I to you?”

“You’re my best friend.”

“Best friends don’t usually kiss the way we kiss or do some of the other things we’ve talked about doing.”

“I don’t know what other people do in private. And other people don’t need to know what we do when we’re alone.”

“Whatever. But doesn’t it seem like we’re becoming a bit more than just friends?”

“Well, yeah, there’s some attraction between us. We can do stuff if we want, but that’s between you and me. And that’s my point. We can have our special friendship. I don’t see why we have to tell everyone else about it by labeling ourselves, joining a community, and wearing rainbow clothes.”

Chris realized further debate was pointless. It would probably make things worse.

They rode in silence. When they were a few blocks from Bryan’s house, he said, “I’m sorry. I know you had a good time today. I guess I rained all over your parade.”

“Let’s just say it didn’t turn out the way I had hoped.”

“I’m still glad you took me there. And I had lots of fun going to the record stores and eating barbecue.”

“Well, good.”

“You still want to come with me to the church after dinner?”

“Yeah, sure. Text me when you’re ready.”

“And we can go to your place and listen to music after that.”

Chris pulled into Bryan’s driveway. Bryan said, “I’ll try not to be such a downer next time.”

Chris smiled weakly. “Good.”

## A Note from the Author

Thank you for downloading this sample chapter. I hope you enjoyed it.

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This is the first in a series of six books that follow Bryan as he finishes high school, goes to college, launches his career, forms relationships, and comes to terms with his past.

I invite you to subscribe to my newsletter. I'll keep you informed about my upcoming books and offer them to you at a discount. I'll share background information about the stories and the writing process. From time to time, I may solicit your input which will help make the books even better! To join, visit my website: [AuthorDaveHughes.com](http://AuthorDaveHughes.com).

To thank you for joining, I will send my short story, *Cruise Virgins*. In it, Bryan (as a young adult) and Ted (whom you will meet in the second book, *Instant Adult*) experience their first gay cruise – and confront their feelings for one another.

Happy reading!

Dave Hughes

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