

# Angels in the Choir

by

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## Chapter Two

### THE CHURCH

There was little in the way of organized social activity for the kids. Boys like Brian weren't allowed to do much of anything outside of school unless sports or The Church was involved. And here that meant Saint Benedict's Roman Catholic Church. Mass at seven, ten and noon every Sunday morning or Saturday night, if you could make it. Religion classes were held every Wednesday night for those whose parents demanded it. Bingo on Wednesday or Saturday at seven o'clock, right after the evening news on television.

The structure of church life was as solid as the gray-green stones of the great walls holding up the roof. But the roof often needed repair, and the parishioners gave what they could to cover a cost that not even God could defray. Good old Saint B's.

The kids in the neighborhood might run and play up and down the street, but never in front of the church. The great Gothic arches over the front doors seemed to balance the round stained glass window above, like two hands juggling a fragile ball. It wasn't a large church, but it had been built to last and at this point it had served quite well for almost seventy-five years.

Most of the families in the neighborhood were either of Irish or Hungarian descent. The joke being that the latter must have made a wrong turn somewhere. But they were a hard working people and that brought acceptance. The Church was full of ethnicity, and though the faces were all white, they all came to God for the same reason. It was a way to cope with their lives.

Brian recalled himself as a small child of five or six, sitting on a hard wooden seat towards the front of the church. The memory involves the smell of incense assaulting his nostrils amidst a sea of women in broad flowery hats and dark veils. The sun shining through the tall stained glass windows brought him joy as it threw bright patches of color across the church.

But he was most fascinated when listening to the elegant sound of the boy's choir in the high loft over their heads. Maybe it was the clouds of pungent smoke roiling over his head or the lack of a pre-church breakfast, but that music used to make his head spin and his heart quicken.

Brian's parents always seemed to enjoy the ten o'clock mass. It was the best show the church put on every Sunday. The priests in their finest robes surrounded by flowers and singing that denoted a High Mass. There were so many times when he used to turn himself completely around and kneel on the bench in their pew, always hoping to catch a glimpse of the boys up there in the loft.

His mother used to pull on his arm to make him turn around and sit up straight, but she seemed to understand the attraction. And she made him a promise he never forgot.

"You like the music, don't you, Brian? When you are twelve I will ask Sister Mary to let you sing in the choir."

For as long as Brian could remember they had a piano in the front room of their house. It was here that his Mom gave an occasional piano lesson, mostly to young girls, but there were a few brave boys as well. Her lessons helped the family pay the bills, although with her joy in music, she probably would have taught for free.

But Brian was the singer in the house. An evening with the family might find his mother at the piano while young Brian sang old Irish melodies with his father. It was a family moment that thrilled his parents. And it seemed to heal the wounds when their two eldest left home.

But the choir inspired Brian, and he sometimes found himself picking out tunes with a single finger on the keyboard. Once she recognized this interest his mother offered to give Brian piano lessons, but he refused.

It was considered less than manly for a boy to play piano, sports being the only acceptable alternative. Piano lessons were out, but he wasn't ready for sports either. Brian watched his friends play stickball games in the church parking lot. There was talk of starting a little league baseball team and his father encouraged him to get involved. No, the only thing Brian ever wanted at such a young age was to sing in the choir.

With this in mind, Brian sang to himself whatever he could remember from the mass. It didn't matter that he didn't understand the Latin words they often sang, the Hallelujahs always came out loud and clear.

True to her word, his mother took him to see the Sister when his twelfth birthday came around. He was so scared of the elder nun in that somber black robe that he almost peed in his pants.

The Sisters of Mercy ran the small parish school and nearby Mercy Hospital. Brian could not attend their school because the tuition was beyond his father's salary at the spice plant upriver. Because he wasn't a student at their school, Sister Mary didn't know him very well.

"And Mr. Mahoney, what will you sing for me today?" she asked.

A strand of her graying hair hung loose from the edge of her starched white headpiece. To Brian all nuns looked the same age, young and old alike, it was impossible for him to tell them apart. But the sisters had always been kind to all the neighborhood kids and for once the Bay responded as one, the nuns were respected.

"Uh, I don't know any real church songs...Sister. But I can do Hallelujahs."

"Why that's wonderful," she said with a smile. "Then give me a great big Hallelujah, in the key of B I think." She placed a finger on the piano key and struck a note which resonated in Brian's head. He opened his mouth and tried his best to imitate the pitch as he had done at home.

It wasn't a great Hallelujah but it was loud and matched the tone of the piano. Sister seemed pleased enough to ask him to sing a song with her. First they sang Happy Birthday while she played the piano to accompany him. And then she asked to hear a song that he might like to sing. After careful thought he chose to sing Danny Boy, a song which Brian knew by heart. What Irish kid didn't?

They finished by singing individual notes and Brian held them for what seemed like a very long time until he ran out of breath. When all was said and done Sister Mary

smiled. And like that, he was in the choir. Practice every Thursday night and mass on Sunday.

Part of the attraction for him to join the choir was the other members, all boys ranging from eleven to seventeen. For if at first the joy of singing motivated him, Brian also sought out the social life associated with these other boys. Here he was a member of an elite group respected by the church as a whole. It was like a gift from God.

Being one of the new members, Brian was made to sit in the corner of the practice room and listen for that first month. This way he learned the songs by observation since none of the boys in the choir could actually read music. Instead, he followed along with the words in a hymnal book that Sister gave him to study.

But it also allowed him to study the other boys. Some of them went to his school, but most of them were just passing acquaintances from the neighborhood. If he was to belong here, Brian would have to come to terms with his inner feeling towards other boys. One slip and he would fall from grace, losing his place amongst the others. And for that he was sure Sister Mary would ask him to leave.

For three years Brian sang as a member of the choir, learning new songs when they did and enjoying the deference paid to the choirboys by the rest of the congregation. It became a normal part of his weekly routine. His lovely alto voice soon gave way to that of a high tenor and Sister Mary helped him learn the new parts for the mass. It seemed like he'd reached the pinnacle of his life in music, until one Thursday night something changed all that.

Two new boys joined them that night. One was a dark wavy-haired kid named Marius. He was from the hearty eastern-European stock that had swarmed into the neighborhood when the chemical plant opened thirty years before.

The other was a young blonde haired boy, and at first sight Brian couldn't believe his eyes. This kid was nothing short of beautiful. An angel, so perfectly like the pictures Brian had seen in his mother's Bible. Sister Mary introduced both boys to the choir and Brian learned his name. Gabriel...Gabriel McGlocklin.

But then Sister had some other news to share. Gabriel had come to them from Saint Mary's on the east side of town where he had been a soloist in their choir. She said that his voice would add a new dimension to the Saint B's choir, and that he had been enrolled in seventh grade at the parish school.

Brian watched the boy all evening as he sat listening to the choir practice. He may have had the look of an angel, but Brian could also tell he was street-smart and very self centered. But with those long eyelashes and rosy red cheeks, the boy also had a feminine quality. Brian felt an immediate kinship and wondered, was he also gay?

The choir sang through several songs and Gabe listened. But then at one point during the rehearsal Sister Mary stood him up beside the piano. She began to play the opening bars of the 'Donna Nobis,' a part of the mass they sang every Sunday, but this time it was different. And with a nod of her head Gabe began to sing by himself.

He sang the words with such conviction and grace the whole choir seemed stunned. His voice was soft and clear, and it sounded wonderful...almost heavenly. Brian was in awe of that sound, knowing soon that he would be amongst these boys supporting the sound of that voice.

It was during those first moments, while Gabe sang, that Brian dared to dream. In his mind came the sudden realization that someday, he too wanted to stand in front of this

choir. It was the first time in his life that Brian knew he wanted to stand out from the crowd. And he could think of nothing else for the rest of the evening.

That night, as he walked the two blocks to his house, the sound of that voice still rang in his ears. Everything he'd seen and heard was crystal clear. The memory of Sister Mary's face beaming with joy, the boys all looking up towards the ceiling to open their throats, and then Gabe...that beautiful angel in all his glory.

In her heart, Sister must have known that Gabe's solo would reach the ears of God in Heaven. That voice would touch the heart of God and be loved, just as it had pierced his own. Brian didn't know what to think of these emotions inside except that something new resided in his mind. A feeling unlike anything else he had ever known.

That night forever changed the routine of Brian's small life. Up to that point he had never considered what he might be doing the following day. It was as if for years his life had drifted with the flow of those around him without purpose or reason. But now he looked forward to choir practice and a chance to be with...him.

Slowly he learned things about the boy, but it was hard going. Gabe didn't talk very much about his time at Saint Mary's. Brian got the distinct feeling that something bad had happened over there on the other side of town. But he would probably never know the truth unless the boy told him straight up.

For the moment it was enough to stand in awe when Gabe sang at mass on Sunday. The sound of his sweet voice lifted the choir's performance into the surreal; they were as angels one and all. It made the boy precious and desirable. But Gabe was quickly gaining a reputation as a real brat over at the parish school. Brian heard from several of his friends that the boy was determined to drive the nuns up the wall and worse, he seemed to be enjoying it.

If he was going to become a part of Gabe's life then Brian knew he had to discover a lot more about the boy. Their time in choir together wasn't good enough, there were too many others vying for the boy's attention. He had to approach Gabe differently and hope the boy would recognize his sincere adoration.

Curtis Bay was positioned on a small strip of land beside the Patapsco River and the inlet that bore its name. It was all but surrounded by the community of Brooklyn where Gabe lived about two dozen city blocks away. The geography was certainly not in Brian's favor. Ironically, his public school was closer to Gabe's home, while the boy attended the parish school virtually next door to Brian's house. It seemed like his plans to become a close friend could be doomed from the beginning.

But one night, a few weeks later, Brian was sitting with his palms flat on the bench while studying the words for the piece they were about to attempt. It seems Gabe was looking the other way when he plopped down on the bench. In doing so the boy sat right on Brian's hand and he could not pull it out.

"You're sitting on my hand," Brian protested.

"Yeah...feels good doesn't it?" Gabe said with a smile, leaning in towards him to whisper, "Always knew you wanted to feel me up, Mahoney."

"What an ass," Brian replied in the same quiet tone. Maybe he should have chosen those words a little more carefully, but he didn't.

"See, you do like it," Gabe laughed.

Brian gave him a startled look and then caught the hint of deviousness in those beautiful blue eyes. With his heart thumping loudly in his chest, Brian found that adorable face only inches away and suddenly he wanted to kiss it.

Lordy, that would have been a huge mistake here in the midst of the choir. But just then Marius playfully threw his new choir robe over their heads and the two of them were isolated under the folds of the cloth. Before Brian knew it, Gabe had their lips pressed together in a kiss. The passion of the moment ignited a fire, one that Brian would never forget.

Marius yanked the robe off and Gabe pulled away laughing. He turned away to slap at Marius while Brian sat frozen, still trying to comprehend what had just happened. The rest of the evening Gabe danced around the practice room, his high spirits infecting the whole group.

Only Gabe's eyes flashing in an occasional glance, and the special smile that followed, made acknowledgement of that secret moment. The pleadings of Brian's heart had grown to fruition. He couldn't have named it, but he was in love with this most wonderful creature.

Fifteen years old...what the hell did he know about love? Oh, he loved his parents and grandparents, but he could not think of another soul that he loved...until now. And the feeling was unlike any other. Brian could close his eyes and feel the touch of those lips while remembering the boyish scent of that beautiful hair. His mind had recorded the details of Gabe's thirteen year old body, the texture of his skin, the gleam of his teeth, in all everything he needed to fuel the flames of his desire.

Alone in the night, he lay in bed with thoughts of Gabe surrounding him and the need to feel that body close to his. It would be days until Brian saw him again, but here in the solitude of his mind he could hold the young boy in his arms and feel the heat. The ache in his heart and the yearning to embrace Gabe was barely eased by squeezing his pillow tightly.

If there was one thing that Brian had learned about relationships it was that they needed to be based upon solid understanding. He had been unsure of himself with Sean, allowing the boy to take the lead and then suffering the repercussions of mistaking his intentions. There could be no errors when it came to Gabe, he had to find out what that kiss had been intended to tell him.

And he knew where Gabe lived. It was in that part of the neighborhood defined by a racial mix that had wandered south from the city. Most of the Bay kids avoided going there. But Brian had black kids at his school, and from what he had seen of them they weren't all that different. Maybe the Brooklyn area had a tough reputation but his goal was clear enough, he had to know more about the boy he loved.

Wandering up Jack Street from the park after school, Brian realized there were more than a few trees in Bay Brook Park separating these nearby neighbors. He looked at the houses he passed and realized that it seemed as if these folks just didn't give a damn anymore. The people didn't look all that different but he could almost feel the poverty of spirit held inside those walls.

Gabe lived at number seventy-four, the address Brian had seen in the notebook which Sister Mary had carelessly left sitting on the piano after practice. But seventy-four was a tattered old place, the shutters barely hanging on, the screen door ripped and standing open. How could such beauty exist in a place like this?

Brian quickly walked by, afraid that he might be recognized if someone was home. But his passage was motivated by a worse fear. What if he were invited into that house? No, he would never want to see the inside, it would shatter his illusions. Quickly, he turned the corner and walked back towards the alley.

The rotten wood fences did little to conceal the bleak yards behind these houses. The debris strewn about on the ground spoke loudly of despair in these people's lives. And further along, some of these houses were boarded up, as if they were beyond resurrection for all time.

He turned down the alley, intending to slip past the back of Gabe's house and make his escape. But there was a familiar car parked at the other end of the alley and Brian stopped in his tracks. Mounted on the roof of the vehicle was the short stubby radio antenna that every young Bay boy recognized. Damn, cops.

The dark blue Chrysler was clearly an unmarked police car and he could see someone was sitting inside. There was movement and Brian started to panic. But just as he was about to turn back and run away, the passenger door opened and Gabe stepped out.

The car's engine immediately revved up and the driver pulled away, leaving the two boys facing one another down the length of the alley.

"What are you doing here?" Gabe called as he walked closer.

"I walked home with a friend of mine," Brian lied" ...you live around here?"

"I live in that house," Gabe said, pointing at the back of seventy-four. "My...uh, uncle just dropped me off."

"Ok, I gotta be going home," Brian said. He wanted to run away, to leave this place. Gabe in a police car could only mean trouble and Brian didn't want any part of it.

"Nobody in my house, wanna come in?" Gabe asked as he approached.

"Uh, no...I can't. Where's your mom?" Brian asked.

"Fucking around somewhere," Gabe said. "I got some cigarettes, you smoke yet?"

"Sometimes," Brian lied yet again.

"Well I can't smoke in the house," Gabe said, "She would kill me. There was this accident in the last house we rented, it sort of burned down." He grinned and there was no mistaking the meaning of that smirk.

"You burned down your own house?" Brian said.

"It was a shit hole anyway, I didn't like it. Miracle was that all my stuff was sitting out in the yard before it happened. She still doesn't know the truth," Gabe laughed. "Come on."

Brian hesitated; he didn't even want to go in the yard. But instead Gabe went through the gate next door to his house and started up a long metal staircase. Brian followed, fascinated by the boy and yet not wanting to give in completely to his fears. What was Gabe doing, was his uncle a cop?

They went up the steps and into the back hallway of the house. A ladder bolted to the wall inside led them up to the roof where Gabe pointed at an old pigeon coop built into the corner.

"I saw rats in there big as a cat when I first came up here, but I shot them and they all left. Well, that was when I had a BB gun. My mom took that away from me a few weeks back. It will make a good clubhouse when I get around to fixing it up."

Brian gazed at the rusting wire cage and the roof of dingy gray plywood. Imagining the rats, he didn't see how it could become much of anything. They sat on several old roofing tar cans and Gabe gave him a cigarette.

"How can you smoke and sing?" Brian asked.

"I get like two of these a day, ain't gonna hurt me like that now, is it? Maybe in twenty years if I smoke a pack a day, but it won't happen. So really, why did you come over here?"

"I was looking for you," Brian said.

"Ok, good enough." His eyes held Brian in a curious gaze and his mouth turned up in a devious grin. "You haven't stopped looking at me since I kissed you," Gabe said. He took a drag on the cigarette and blew out the smoke without inhaling. Brian hadn't even lit his. "Bet you're wondering why I did it, aren't you?"

"It shocked me...I don't know," Brian said.

"Maybe I'll tell you someday. You have a great voice, Brian. You ought to be singing in front of the choir."

"No way, I don't sing that good."

"Sing that well," Gabe corrected. "Don't talk like that other Curtis Street trash, learn the language. One day you'll be out of here so learn some good habits now. This place isn't the place to be. We both have to get out of here somehow."

"You're leaving?" Brian asked.

"One way or another, I can't go on living here." Gabe sighed and then set his face in a frown. "My mother is a fucking whore, Brian. Believe me, I mean that. She's always bringing these guys home, and then suddenly there is money to be spent. I don't even know my father. He was just some cock full of jizz that made her pregnant."

Gabe dropped the remains of his cigarette on the dusty black surface of the roof and watched it smolder. Brian wondered if it would catch fire and was about to say something when Gabe crushed it out with the heel of his sneaker.

"My life isn't so great, all I have is singing."

"I want to be your friend," Brian said.

Gabe smiled. "I know...it's why I kissed you. I thought maybe it would scare you away, but it didn't." His eyes were sad now and yet Brian knew this was a defining moment between them. "You don't want to get too close to me, Brian. Everyone says I'm a disaster waiting to happen."

"I better go, it's getting late," Brian said. He handed back the un-lit cigarette and stood up. Gabe reached out a hand and Brian pulled him to his feet. Gabe put his arms around Brian's waist and hugged him tight.

The boy felt so good as Brian hugged back, his hands pressing them close. How long had he waited to be like this, and yet the moment wasn't at all sexy, it was sad. Gabe leaned his head back and looked up into Brian's face.

"You can be my friend if you want," he said, "just don't expect too much from it."

Brian bent his head until his lips touched Gabe's forehead.

"I still want to be your friend," Brian said. "But that wasn't your uncle in the car, was it?"

Gabe laughed and they stood apart, the mood changed and suddenly got serious. "You saw that, didn't you? Well, forget it. You don't want to know him."

"Know who...the cop?" Brian asked.

Gabe stared at him for a moment, deciding what he might say. "That's Pullman...Detective Frank Pullman, whatever. He's a bad man, Brian, you stay away from him."

"I...I don't even know what he looks like?" Brian said.

"Oh, yeah. But I'm sure he knows who you are, he knows all about the Bay boys. You gonna keep a secret for me?"

"I swear," Brian said.

"You better not repeat this or...Pullman likes boys. You know what that means?" Brian nodded and Gabe spat on the roof to show his disgust. "He busted me for pinching a pack of smokes at the drugstore over in my old neighborhood. He gets me in the car and puts the cuffs on. Says he's gonna take me up to the station and arrest me for shoplifting. But then he put his hand in my lap and grabbed my dick, said I could get out of the rap if I did something he'd like."

"He's a pervert?" Brian asked.

Gabe nodded, "And with a badge he's fucking dangerous. He followed me over here when we moved. I give him something every couple of weeks, something he enjoys, you understand?"

"Uh, you do it with him? That's gross."

"No way out of it now, he knows where I live. You see the plate on the car? BCP-802, that's a city cop tag. You remember that number, Brian. If you see that car, run away from it, go somewhere safe, someplace where there's lots of people. I think he's crazy, but he won't bother you if there are folks around."

"Why don't you tell on him?"

"No one will believe me, he's got the badge. Forget it. He won't bother anyone while I'm around. At least he gives me money and cigarettes."

Brian walked home through the park, thinking about what Gabe had said. How could his mother...? What did Gabe have to do for Pullman? But then he already knew the answer to that one. Gabe would do whatever it took.

But other words lingered in his mind as well. "You can be my friend if you want." It was what Brian had wanted to hear, they would be friends. But he also knew it would be best to keep this friendship a secret for now. It seemed Gabe was a whole lot more than just a pretty face and the rest wouldn't be easy to explain. BCP-802. Brian promised himself that he would remember that number.

He came home to the smell of meat roasting in the oven and the sounds of his mother humming in the kitchen. These were signs of good tidings in the Mahoney house, for his mother rarely spent hours cooking just for an ordinary evening meal.

As Brian opened the kitchen door he could see the flush of joy on her cheeks and the unopened bottle of wine sitting on the kitchen counter.

"What's happened?" he asked.

She took his hands and they danced around the kitchen floor for a few turns. Something really good was afoot.

"Your father has been promoted to supervisor," she laughed.

Brian joined in the joy with a laugh, for even his young mind knew that promotion for his father was rare and only good things came from it. Their color television had arrived three years before upon just such an occasion.

"What will he be doing?" Brian asked.

"Not just a mere shift supervisor, but a whole department. Now you go wash up, he's coming home early today," she said.

It was over pot roast and potatoes that Brian learned how such good fortune would touch their lives. His father would purchase a new car, his mother would get a previously unheard of dishwasher and they could vacation at the beach next summer. But then Mr. Mahoney put down his fork and looked at his son.

"For a long time I've wanted to place you in parochial school and now we can afford it," he said. "How would you like to go to Saint Benedict's next year?"

Brian felt the blood rush to his face; he couldn't believe his father had spoken those words.

"Yes...oh, yes...that would be wonderful," he replied.

"I believe he is doing well enough to maintain his grade level and Sister Mary tells me they have a few tenth grade openings left for next year," his mother said.

Brian was on his knees at the foot of the bed that night. Nightly prayers had always included family and the many troubled people around the world that were sometimes mentioned at mass. But tonight was special, tonight God had smiled upon him and there was a great need to be thankful. BCP-802, what kind of dangerous game was Gabriel playing? Oh Lord, keep him safe.

It was a time of life when religion still had a firm hold on the boy. In his mind God made all things possible and the Church had yet to become aware of his feelings towards Gabe. But his heart spoke directly to God at that moment and Brian felt the grace and love the Almighty placed upon him through prayer. His argument with the Church might come later, but tonight he was focused entirely on love.

The announcement that he was going to the parish school was met with less than anticipated joy. He only told a few friends, all of whom would not be leaving public school no matter what he did. But the choir received the news with better spirit and Brian felt welcomed into the fold. Gabe gave his unqualified congratulations and then their lives went back to normal. As if there could be anything normal about Brian's feelings for Gabe. He was scared for the boy.

But Gabe acted as if nothing had happened between them. He continued to be the most popular boy in choir. Although they often talked during practice and before mass, Brian continued to worship from afar. It was the most confusing part of their relationship. Gabe didn't seem to show any interest in picking up where they had left off. His smiles were warm and friendly but not amorous. What was Brian supposed to make of it?

Going to the same school would quickly provide them with more time to explore that vast field of affection and commitment. It was what he wanted from Gabe, a commitment, and in turn he would be loved and adored. But nothing happened.

Brian already knew what he could do to please Gabe if he were given the chance. Kissing was a good place to start up again. He remembered how excited Sean had become and now he was glad he hadn't taken that next step with the boy. No, it would be better now with Gabe...whenever it happened.

They were preparing for the Christmas Mass celebration which was only two weeks away. Since Thanksgiving, the choir had been sprinkling the Sunday mass with a few Christmas pieces. Brian still enjoyed his place in the front row amidst the tenors...a place that kept him standing close to Gabe.

Rehearsal that particular Thursday evening was preceded by a good six inches of wet snow, blanketing the Bay area in a coat of dismal white slop. This close to a major body of water they rarely got a real hard freeze and this was about the norm. Only a few boys would find themselves unable to make the practice in this kind of bad weather. Those boys already attending the school usually just stayed behind until the scheduled rehearsal time.

Public school let out early and so the bus had Brian home by one o'clock. He quickly walked the two blocks to the parish school, hoping that Gabe would still be there with time on his hands.

Going immediately to the school office, as protocol required, Brian found Sister Ann on the phone talking to parents about the school closing.

"Yes, Mrs. Miller," he heard her say, "We're closing in half an hour... We generally follow the public school procedure...Yes, Anthony will be waiting inside the main entrance for you...I'll be sure and tell him to wait...No, we won't let him leave...Thank you...Yes, Good-Bye."

She sighed as she put down the phone. Looking up at Brian's approach, she smiled.

"Since when is a little snow such a big crisis?" she said aloud.

"First snow of the season, always a big deal," Brian replied.

"You're Brian...Mahoney, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, Sister," he replied. They hadn't spoken since he attended her religion class in the third grade. "I was wondering if Gabriel McGlocklin was still here. We have practice tonight."

"Yes, he'll be out of class in just a few minutes. I suppose Sister Mary will hold practice for those that can attend."

"Too close to Christmas to miss a single practice," Brian replied in his best imitation of Sister Mary.

Sister Ann smiled, "You aren't mocking her now are you?"

"Oh no, Sister, I would never do that. I was just wondering if Gabriel would like to have dinner at my house before practice. Could he call his mother for permission?"

"What a nice thought. You're a good friend to make that offer, Brian. Why don't you wait for him to come down the hall and I'll let him use the phone to call his mother."

The phone started ringing at that point and Sister stared down at it with another sigh before picking up the receiver. "Saint Benedict's," he heard her say before he went looking for Gabriel.

Although Brian had been in the building for community events he had never been here when school was in session. The sounds of the Sisters teaching class reached him through the heavy wooden doors lining the hallway, their voices strong and clear in their lessons.

The smell of wood polish and floor wax used to maintain the building hung in the air. This place was so old it might not see another decade of use. Paint was peeling along the wood trim around the windows.

If any of these sights was discouraging, he never felt the emotion. He would soon be a part of this place. And then a sight in the distance lifted his spirits. Gabe was sitting in a chair down the hall.

"Hi," Brian said as he approached.

"I can't talk to you while I'm sitting out here," Gabe said. "This is the punishment chair."

"Oh...sorry."

Brian went over and leaned against the radiator under the broad window at the end of the hall. A dim light filtered through the clouds, pooling around them on the worn linoleum floor. And Gabe sat silently across the hallway while Brian stared at his beauty and smiled.

They were alone here at the end, the long corridor stretching away towards the entrance and the front office in the distance. Gabe leaned his chair back against the wall and stared back at Brian across the space between them. In the intimacy of the moment Brian knew those blue eyes were fixed on him and a blush rose to his face.

Gabe began to lick his lips and then puckered them in Brian's direction. Ever the tease, what was he doing now? Gabe crossed his arms, placing his hands on his shoulders and then he began hugging himself. The kissing motions were followed by his hands caressing his shoulders as if he were making out with himself.

It was extremely funny but Brian would not give in to laughter. Besides, if a nun stepped into the hall they would both get in trouble. Gabe had done something to warrant his current seat in the chair and now he was trying to drag Brian down with him.

Gabe stopped the hugging when that tactic didn't work. He slid a hand down his chest and began to rub his crotch. He knew this would get Brian's undivided attention. The allusion to masturbation continued but Brian lost his nerve and broke his gaze away, looking down the empty hall. What if someone saw them?

"Ahem," Gabe said and Brian looked back. The boy had managed to work himself into an erection and he was poking it down his pants leg to show off the outline in the fabric.

Brian smiled at the tease and began to suck on his index finger, the generally well known symbol for giving a blowjob. Gabe responded with body language that included thrusting and tossing his head around as if Brian was actually performing the task on him. The twenty feet between them meant nothing. In both their minds they were having sex.

Brian worked the finger in and out, the stroke becoming faster until he suddenly stopped, placed a hand to his throat and made choking sounds. Gabe gasped and they both broke up laughing, the sound bouncing off the ancient walls. Fortunately the bell chose that very moment to ring and the hall quickly flooded with students.

One of the Sisters came out with her students and took Gabe's arm, leading him back into the classroom. By the time Brian eased over to the door and peeked inside Gabe was bent over her desk and receiving strokes from a paddle. Brian counted five smacks before the boy walked out into the hall.

Gabe smiled as they strode down the crowded hallway. He rubbed his butt, a mischievous grin on his face. "Was it good for you? I sure got off. What brings you here?"

"Snow...we had an early release. I was wondering if you wanted dinner before practice tonight. Like, eating dinner at my house?"

"Uh, sure. Let me call my mom. No wait, she didn't pay the phone bill, too bad for her." Gabe reached into his backpack and removed a small metal tin. He opened it to reveal three regular cigarettes and a special rolled item. "I know someplace we can smoke," he said.

"Not at my house, that's for sure," Brian said. "Where can we go?"

They ducked through the side door of the school building and went down the alley to the back of the church. Brian followed the boy down a narrow set of stairs into the school's basement. It seems Gabe had been exploring these old buildings.

"Thought I knew every nook and cranny until last week when I discovered something new," he said.

In the years before modern furnaces these old buildings had been served by a series of huge old boilers. When the last modernization had come to Saint B's, the old equipment had been cut up and hauled away, the boiler room closed and the door sealed. Or so they thought.

Someone had re-opened the doorway and installed a common padlock. In his explorations, Gabe had discovered that they foolishly hid a key above the door. He reached for it now and unlocked the door. Replacing the padlock, he snapped it back in place. In the gloom down here a quick glance and someone might think the door was still locked.

"Cool...what's in there?" Brian asked.

"My secret place...all kinds of stuff, you'll see."

The new furnace put off some great heat down here so their little escapade was already making them sweat. Brian pushed open the door and Gabe turned on the lights. The ancient room stretched out into the distance, like a small cavern under the building. There were boxes of old school records, broken desks and best of all, a few couches lay scattered amidst the clutter.

"Welcome to the Saint B's student lounge," Gabe said.

"You come down here a lot?"

"Just to smoke," Gabe laughed. "The furnace keeps anyone from smelling the smoke. At least I haven't been caught yet. You start smoking yet?"

Brian shook his head, but he was willing to try anyway. They sat on one of the couches and Gabe lit first a cigarette and then the joint. He sucked in a lot of the sweet smoke and then handed the joint over. Brian had never tried weed before. He took a little puff for now.

"We'll be hungry after we finish this, what's your mom making for dinner?" Gabe asked.

"I don't know, I didn't ask her," Brian replied.

"Oh shit, she doesn't even know you invited me?"

"That's ok, we always have plenty."

"Wouldn't fly at my house, my mother would kill me," Gabe said.

Brian couldn't imagine eating at Gabe's house. It would just be another part of the nightmare. Finally the joint was too small to smoke and Brian was happy about that. The room suddenly seemed smaller, as if the walls were beginning to close in. So this is what being high meant.

"How long does this stuff last?" Brian asked.

"Two hours, tops. I've had better weed but this is ok. What you did up in the hall was real funny, you suck fingers often?"

"Only if I'm getting paid," Brian joked. Maybe Gabe wouldn't think that was funny but he seemed to ignore the comment. "You worked up a stiff one, didn't you?"

Gabe laughed. "You want to see it, don't you?"

"If you want," Brian replied. Now why did his mouth suddenly feel so dry?

Gabe smiled as he unzipped his pants and pushed them down around his ankles. His briefs followed and Brian looked down.

"Go on, you can touch it if you want. I know you want to, Brian."

Brian placed a finger against the side of Gabe's cock and felt how rigid it had become.

"Do you...does it make sperm?"

Gabe laughed, "A little bit, but I'm hoping for the mother load real soon. It sure feels good to play with. Bet you got a lot more than this...come on, show me."

Brian felt himself blush a deep red and his cheeks became hot. He remembered the days when he couldn't keep his hands off himself. But then came puberty and...it was supposed to be a sin to play with it. He dropped his pants and lowered his boxers.

"Damn...you are big," Gabe said.

"Well, I am fifteen...you want to do something?" Brian asked.

"Oh, you do that too? I don't feel like jerking off."

"I could help out," Brian said.

Gabe smiled. "Go for it."

Gabe put his cigarette out in an old soda bottle and leaned back on the couch. Tentatively, Brian grasped what had been the object of such great fantasy. But now that it was real he wasn't sure he could do it right.

And even as he took it in his mouth some of the magic was gone. Gabe had done this with that pervert cop for money. How could he just do that with a stranger? But now there was no turning back.

For his part, Gabe just sat there, occasionally placing a hand on top of Brian's head and pushing deeper when the thought occurred to him. Brian couldn't tell if Gabe was enjoying himself, the boy was completely silent. But finally he seemed to jerk a little and Brian knew he was having a dry orgasm.

Gabe didn't say a thing, not even a groan. No, just a final thrust and it was over. Then he grabbed Brian's head and lifted him off.

"You can stop now, it's getting real sensitive."

"I thought there would be..." Brian said. What did he expect?

"Hell, Brian, I'll get there...someday. Will you keep another secret?" Gabe asked.

"Yes," Brian said. This boy seemed to be full of secrets.

"I've been having sex with guys since I was a little kid."

"You have...? No way," Brian said.

"Yup, I made some good bucks at it...until Pullman came along and fucked me over."

"Him again...he caught you?"

"He was a customer, doing the cop thing undercover. I lied to you before, he never busted me for shoplifting...I just couldn't tell you the truth then."

This was a revealing moment. Gabe wasn't just fooling around with other boys. But since the illusion was now shattered, Brian had to ask.

"You ever get fucked?"

"Why you want to know?" Gabe laughed, "You like getting fucked yourself?"

"I...I never did it before."

"You don't like girls do you?" Gabe suddenly asked. Brian shook his head, revealing his deepest secret.

Gabe smiled, "Well neither do I." Then he leaned over and they kissed, longer and deeper than their first time. They finally separated and Gabe looked down in Brian's crotch.

"I might have to try that on for size, but I can't do it today. Is that ok?" he asked.

"It's because...well, I'm still sore back there."

"You did it with...with that cop?" Brian asked.

"You keeping score for me now? Yes, it was him. Stay away from the perv. You'll only get yourself hurt and I don't want that to happen. Promise?"

"Yeah, I promise," Brian said.

"And if you wanna know, getting fucked hurts. You start that shit too early and all you get is hurt, ok? You satisfied now that you know all my secret stuff?"

"I won't ever tell, Gabe."

"Better not, I could get in a world of trouble. And that's why I worry about Pullman seeing us together. He's hurt some kids before, I heard about it." Gabe looked Brian in the eye. "I don't want that happening to you...I care about you."

Brian felt the emotions well up inside and fought to keep the tears from his eyes. The boy cared for him, this was a milestone. But then Gabe laughed and that seemed to dispel the feelings.

"I am hungry now for sure....you?"

"Yeah, I got the munchies real bad," Brian laughed.

It was never the same after that. Brian still felt the love, but not like before. The reality of Gabe's life was awful. On the outside Brian saw the angel, the vision that made his heart pound, but inside there was just another Bay boy hustler. And although Brian was frightened by the depth of that hustle and the cop who was involved, he still wanted to be Gabe's friend.

As a boy matures, the voice drops and yet Brian's remained in the high tenor range. But Gabe had never been anything but a soprano. He said when his voice changed that he wouldn't be able to sing the parts he wanted. But Brian knew Sister Mary would change the music; she could lower his parts, adapting them to his new voice. But Brian figured he would never get a solo while Gabe remained in the choir.

From Christmas to Easter and on towards the following summer, Gabe and Brian hung out when they could. There were more afternoons in the school basement and sometimes the mood to fool around struck them both. But it never became anything more serious than where they had already been.

The realities of the Gabe's life had changed everything. His beauty still fostered attention and love, but then Brian realized this wasn't the one for him. His angel was only a bad little boy in disguise.