

# Angels in the Choir

by

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## Chapter Three

### PRIESTS

It was just before the school year ended that the choir received a mild shock. Sister Mary announced her retirement from teaching. Brian had never thought about it before but it seems nuns did retire when they got old enough. His only thought was that she wouldn't be there when he started at the Saint B's school in the fall.

There was a small party at the church hall and the choir all went to sing for her. It was the first time Brian had ever seen Sister Mary cry. But Gabe joked that he'd made quite a few nuns weep in his years at school. Nothing surprising there, Brian thought.

A young priest attended the party and hung back behind the old Monsignor, Father Connor. And as the party ended, the monsignor called the boys of the choir together.

"Boys, I want to introduce Father Dominic, he will be taking over the responsibility of leading the choir. Father Dominic would you like to say a few words?"

The young man stepped forward and smiled. He had dark wavy hair and deep green eyes that seemed to look into each of them as he spoke. Brian looked over at Gabe and saw the rapt attention he was giving the priest. Yeah, the guy was pretty handsome, and Gabe seemed to agree.

"I've been to Saint Benedict's before," Dominic began. "I came to mass a few weeks ago to see what I was up against. And to my great delight I saw that Sister Mary has created a true wonder with this choir. You all seem to have fine voices so I don't think any real changes will be needed under my leadership.

"But I would like to see you get out into the community and spread the joy I hear in your young voices. A choir is a good outreach program for the parish and so I'm going to schedule some small performances away from the church.

"There is great joy in singing all kinds of music. To that end, I will be teaching you some modern music as well. And since some of our audiences will be non-Catholic, I think it will certainly broaden our appeal. Besides, it's always fun to learn new things, don't you agree?"

There were nods from all the boys. The Latin was sometimes awkward to learn and they had often asked Sister Mary to sing more songs in English. Dominic's introduction was pretty cool but it was made even better when the boys learned that he drove a shiny new Lincoln Continental. Everyone adjourned to the parking lot just to see it.

Brian asked Gabe what he thought and all the boy said was "Sweet." It wasn't entirely clear if he meant the car or Dominic.

A young priest in the parish was a treat for the kids in the congregation. The elder priests, Father Connor and Father Brendan, were thought to be harmless enough. The parishioners might get a whiff of whiskey when they took communion mass on Sunday, but everyone ignored that. After all, these two often made the rounds of the parish homes

for dinners and drinks. Their involvement with the parish youth wasn't all it should have been.

But Dominic proved to be a breath of fresh air. He started a local youth basketball program over at the Armory and plunged right in with the choir. Brian heard he sat in on some of the classes at the school and wondered how the nuns took that. And occasionally he was seen giving some of the parish boys a ride in his car. Dominic seemed to be very involved with his parish work.

Brian always tried to go to confession when Dominic was on duty. The very sound of his gentle voice on the other side of that carved wooden screen made Brian's heart pound something fierce. But although the man was kind, Brian never felt any warmth from Dominic.

He wore tight black pants all the time and Brian found himself looking for a clue as to what might be beneath that cloth. Dominic would stand at the front during rehearsals and mass while he conducted, and all Brian could do was stare at his crotch.

He still remembered the first words Dominic directed to him:

"Straighten up, boy. You can't sing all slouched over like that."

Not memorable or adoring words, but Brian was desperate for any kind of feeling from the man. He knew by then that Gabe was given rides in Father Dominic's car. But Brian was also sure his parents would never allow him to ride in anyone's car, even a priest's.

Whereas Gabe and Brian had spend a lot of time together during the year, when school let out for the summer that quickly changed. Gabe suddenly made excuses about being busy. It could have been maddening but Brian figured the boy would pretty much do what he liked anyway, no matter what anyone thought. The whole business with the detective still bothered him. Did Gabe still hang out with the cop?

He might be envious of the boy's apparent friendship with the priest, but instead it hurt since it was killing their relationship. Brian just hoped that Dominic was aware of the risk he took spending time with Gabe. For by then he was beginning to think the boy was the pre-eminent Bay boy hustler of all time.

## **TEEN CLUB**

The horrors of their parish teen club were legendary long before Brian decided to go down the street one Friday night and sign up. Going to teen club was a boy's worst nightmare but he was moping about the house and his mother decided he should give it a try. The other kids at school had painted a bleak picture of the Friday night gatherings.

He'd heard tales about girls groping a boy in dark corners and threatening to cut off certain parts if you didn't kiss them. Before his entrance into seventh grade Brian was sure that every girl in his neighborhood carried a knife in her purse just for that very purpose.

But no girl would stand a chance with him. Although he knew there would be some attractive boys at the club, he knew that was a waste of time. It was likely that Sean would be there too. His presence was a concern although Brian finally realized Sean couldn't say anything about the past without condemning them both.

The reality of teen club was that hardly anyone danced to the stupid music the church allowed them to play, and no one ate the stale cookies or drank the insipid punch.

The old priests hardly ever showed their faces, preferring to be upstairs smoking cigars and drinking whisky at their card table.

All this lack of supervision seemed a wonder in a place usually dominated by the nuns. The hall was like a dungeon except for a grimy mirror ball rotating overhead under pale blue lights hidden amidst faded crepe paper streamers tacked to the ceiling. The kids could have been smoking pot down there except that most of them didn't have enough cash to buy even a single joint.

Instead girls often danced with one another while the boys wrestled in the corners. Occasionally Brian saw a boy and girl combination dancing. Was that a knife pressed against his back?

For his part, Brian usually ducked out the back door five minutes after arriving and walked down the alley towards Curtis Avenue. And if one of his friends wasn't hanging out at the convenience store then he'd beat feet over two blocks to the strip of bars on Patapsco where he could hustle a few quarters from the drunks.

He had a talent for spotting the winners as they came out of a pool hall. Hitting them up for even a tiny fraction of their winnings took a certain charm. But these guys all had little brothers at home and would often be generous just to impress the ladies that followed the money trail. Brian earned a dollar or even a fiver on occasion. And that's where he first met Pat.

Brian knew of him before this but he'd never actually met him, there was a difference. Here in Curtis Bay there were lots of folks and they all knew each other as part of the neighborhood, personal relationships were a different thing.

The city's row houses were slammed against one another and the postage stamp yards offered little privacy, but personal space was important. People were clannish within family groups, working groups and social groups. The guys on the next block could be total strangers even though you might smell their barbecue in summer.

But let a total stranger walk up the street and a dozen eyes would follow along. It was more than intense curiosity, it was a lookout system. The cops didn't have a chance catching a Bay boy here on the street. And by the time they could knock on the door, the man they were after was probably two blocks over and gone. The neighborhood protected their own and God help the outsider, be he black or white.

His name was Patrick Sullivan, and Brian was thoroughly taken in by his bright blue eyes and the mop of reddish blonde hair. But being as Pat was at least twenty-five, and cock of the walk in Curtis Bay pool hall society, it meant their lives were never supposed intersect. At least his parents would see it that way, and that was probably one of the reasons Brian found him so attractive.

Pat lived in a walk up apartment on Olmstead above the Chinese grocery. A dreary little flat, Brian imagined, with bare light bulbs in ceiling fixtures and tattered roll down shades in windows that were never opened.

Brian was sure that Pat had no idea that he was being stalked ever since Gabe had started hanging with the priest. The guy was always a standout when he managed to make the ten o'clock mass and Brian had spied him long ago from that high perch in the choir loft. But there was no reason for him to remember Brian from church, even if they did suddenly meet out on the street.

And so when he cut teen club on that particular Friday night in July, Brian went looking for Pat and discovered him outside Gene's Bar. He was talking loudly on the pay phone at the corner.

"So tell him to wait until I get there, Dan."

He was leaning into the phone booth but his voice was loud enough to be heard half-way up the block. And then his one-sided conversation took a strange turn.

"Shit, you mean he doesn't care to wait? ...then send him home, buddy. I'd rather screw a choir boy if that's his attitude. We can get stuff elsewhere."

He slammed the receiver down, closed his eyes and banged his head repeatedly against the glass window. By then Brian was standing on the sidewalk maybe four feet away. In the glare of the overhead street light he could see only the red hair and the shape of Pat's denim-clad body.

He was so handsome...so beautiful. But then Brian's eyes began to trace down that slender torso, admiring the tight fit of his jeans and the shapely contour of...Brian looked back up and was shocked to see Pat staring down at him with amusement.

"And what's it to ya?" he grinned, his voice muffled by the glass. It was then that Brian realized the man was politely...well, plain drunk.

"Like what ya see, boy?" Pat took two steps out of the phone booth, spun a three-sixty on his heels and laughed before dropping down in the gutter like a sack of rocks.

Brian had gasped at his fall and then grinned with amusement when he realized Pat was out cold. Looking down and thinking maybe he had injured himself during the fall, Brian burst out laughing when Pat began to snore. But there was no one on the street to help the boy rouse him.

Brian knew he just couldn't leave the guy lying there. A look up and down the block said that no one was going to come to Pat's rescue. The sound from within Gene's place never skipped a beat as the man snored away.

Cops...Brian could see the squad car two blocks down as they patrolled. Their spotlight beam played across storefronts as they checked for break-ins. Shit, Pat would get busted for sure.

"Pat...wake up," he shouted.

Pat stirred in his sleep and rolled on his side. And suddenly Brian got angry, why had Pat done such a stupid thing? Brian kicked him none too gently in the butt and Pat batted a hand in the direction of the blow. Shit.

He bent over and almost gagged at the smell of stale beer on Pat's breath. "Cops," he yelled once again.

That seemed to register somewhere in the few brain cells left functioning. Pat opened his eyes, "What ya yellin for?"

Brian grinned. "The cops are down the block and here you are lying drunk in the gutter. Oh shit."

"Stop yelling, boy....cops?" Pat started looking around and spotted the patrol crossing the intersection a block away. "Oh shit."

Brian stuck out a hand and Pat took it. But a one hundred and twenty pound boy was helpless to haul Pat's weight up off the ground. Brian tugged and pulled until Pat rolled over and finally used the boy to steady himself into a standing position. "Lean on me," Brian said.

He helped Pat stagger across the street and down the sidewalk until they stood in front of the grocery building. Pat fumbled in his pants pocket for the keys and promptly dropped them on the steps. Brian picked them up and opened the door. "Thanks, kid," Pat said.

Looking up the long steep flight of stairs, Brian knew Pat would never make it without falling so he got behind to push. Somehow there was something very obscene about placing his hands on Pat's butt and pushing him up those stairs. But he enjoyed every second until they hit the landing at the top.

A ratty green couch and beat-up coffee table littered with beer cans was the first introduction to Pat's place. A threadbare tan carpet, old black and white television on a cheap chip-board cabinet, dirty dishes in the kitchen sink, this was home.

His bedroom had a broken dresser and a full sized bed, nothing more unless you counted the cardboard boxes piled against several of the walls. No lamps, no flowers, no decorations of any kind...except for the drawings. Brian helped Pat to bed where the man flopped on his back. What would he do now, Brian asked himself?

Pat's eyes were closed and Brian thought he had passed out again. The drawings were everywhere. Dozens and dozens of them tacked to the faded walls. Brian began to tremble and his head felt light as he realized what they were.

Each of the pencil drawings was on a stark white sheet of paper. But the subject of each one seemed to leap out at him. In dozens of different poses, each one held a startlingly beautiful depiction of a naked boy.

Brian gasped when he recognized some of them. Was that Gabriel?

"You like those?" he heard a voice say. Pat was staring up at him.

"You'd rather screw choir boys...now it makes sense," Brian said.

"Who said anything about screwing boys?" Pat laughed. His mirth cut short as he began to cough. Brian knew that sound too well. His uncle coughed like that after his second pack of smokes.

"You did...in the phone booth," Brian said.

"Do I know you?" Pat asked.

"I'm the guy that pulled you out of the gutter," Brian said, sticking his hand out for a shake. "Brian Mahoney, we haven't met before."

"Yeah, haven't I seen you in church? Ya got any smokes, Brian? I seem to be all out."

"There's a pack on your coffee table. Can you sit up?"

"I really need to...my head is starting to make the room spin."

"Go barf it all up in the toilet, that's what my Uncle Frank does."

"Now why did you have to go and say..." Pat began but he suddenly looked pale. Brian listened to him throw up in the toilet bowl but it didn't matter. His mind was aflame by the gallery of bodies on the wall. Each of the drawings was compelling and...damn, they were exciting.

Gabe, that one was surely Gabriel in all his...glory? But then there was Bobby...and Tim and even Alan Wainwright.

How did Patrick ever get Alan to pose for a drawing like that? Alan was two years older and at seventeen he was one of the real tough guys on the street. From what Brian had seen of him in the neighborhood, the kid was no choir boy. Thank God for that.

But here Alan was in a sexy pose, and he looked magnificent. Was he having sex with Pat? The thought made Brian blush. It was really none of his business.

He counted five of his acquaintances in the drawings. Why had none of them ever said anything about posing for Pat? He thought Gabe would have said something about it after confiding so many other secrets. Something this huge would certainly have been a topic of conversation somewhere.

"Wadda ya think?" Pat said from the bathroom door. Water dripped down on the wood floor from the wet tangle of his hair. The front of his shirt was soaking wet.

"Did you fall in?" Brian snickered.

"Cold water in the sink sobers me up some," Pat said. "You seen a towel?"

Brian looked in a box and saw a stack of towels that said "Holiday Inn," so he snagged one and handed it over.

"Thanks," Pat said.

"You get all these boys to pose for you?" Brian asked. As if pretending he didn't know who they were.

"Some," he said with a grin. "Others I just did from memory." His voice trailed off, sparing Brian the details.

"Oh, your drawings are just amazing," Brian said.

Pat looked at him and shook his head. Brian wanted to know what he was thinking that very moment. But even more, he wanted to know why Pat had never asked to draw him.

"And...?" Pat asked. "You must have more to say about this."

"Yes...well, I'm...I'm a choir boy."

Pat looked a little shocked for a moment and then he let out a barking laugh. "Oh, you think...no, it was just an expression. I don't really screw little boys, Brian. Is that what you think of me?"

"I didn't know about...I still don't know. Look at all these drawings, man, what am I supposed to think?"

"I think boys are beautiful and I like to draw them," Pat said.

"But what about the sex part? Like that one, that's two boys playing with one another and ...hey, I know that kid."

"I imagine you know a few of them. Most of them live around here and go to our church." He let that thought linger a moment. "But you have to believe me, Brian. I am not having sex with any of them. They can have sex with each other, I don't mind that. I just want to draw them."

Brian shook his head. "And they let you watch?"

"For money, yes. Nothing is free round here, you know that."

Now it was starting to make sense. The hustle in the Bay area would look the other way in a situation like this if there was some cash to be made. Hell, the pervs wouldn't drive over here from the east side if that wasn't the case. Cash was king and if the trade didn't get noticed then it didn't seem to exist.

The art angle on what Pat was doing seemed pretty straight up compared to other shit Gabe told him about. It made Brian wonder what he had to do to get in on the deal. There would be all kinds of benefits from something like this.

"You think I'm worth drawing?" Brian asked. No sense in beating around the bush.

Pat smiled, "You want in?"

"Guy has to work somehow."

"You willing to work with another boy? Say this one," Pat said. He tapped one of the drawings. It had to be Alan. Brian could only imagine what Alan would like to do to him with that huge cock.

"Uh...maybe. Depends on what you want Alan to do."

"Oh, I forgot, you know him. Would that be uncomfortable for you two, like after the drawing was over?"

"No," Brian answered. "No, we don't talk much anyway. What will he want to do...if he agrees?"

"He'd probably like to screw you, but it doesn't have to be like that. Your size in relationship to him, the difference in hair coloring, body shape, facial expression; those things interest me." Pat looked at the drawing of Alan and again issued that short barking laugh. "You're worried that he might want to screw you. Look, I don't recommend it."

"What if I wanted him to?"

Pat stared at him a moment and then smiled. "You're gay, aren't you?" he said, and all Brian could do was blush.

"I...I don't really know," he replied.

Pat smiled. "I have to take a shower and sober up a bit. You gonna stick around?"

"Uh, yeah, at least for a while, if that's all right?"

"That's fine, I don't mind the company. Probably keep me from falling out the window."

And so Brian sat on the end of the bed as Patrick undressed. Peeling away his shirt, the man revealed a broad muscular chest covered with fine red hair and dozens of freckles. He was too young for a beer belly despite his drinking habits; maybe that would come later. Brian watched closely as the pants hit the floor.

"You like watching this, don't you," Pat said.

"Hey, you invited me to stay." Brian replied.

"Guess I did, just don't enjoy it so much, ok?"

Patrick took two steps towards the bathroom door and dropped his boxers. Brian almost gasped, amazed at his first real sighting of an adult male fully naked. Hands on hips Pat just stood there in the doorway and let him get a real good look. Gabe couldn't hold a candle to this man's body. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

Patrick snapped his fingers and Brian looked up at his face. "One day, kiddo, and you will have something real nice all your own." He smiled and turned towards the bathroom.

Pat wouldn't have sex with him, he knew that now. But this was as close as he had ever come to being with a man. There were feelings inside he couldn't begin to understand but maybe...maybe Pat would help him discover what they meant.

That Pat thought he was gay was something very reassuring. Brian had only felt good about it ever since Gabe came into his life. All he ever did was fanaticize about sex with guys so it must be true. But the hard part was realizing that so far the men he wanted wouldn't have sex with him. Why weren't gay men attracted to boys?

Pat got out of the shower and sat naked on the end of the bed as he dried himself off.

"I..." Brian began.

"Not gonna happen. This is as far as it goes," Pat said. "If you are gay, Brian, that's all right with me."

"Your body is amazing..."

"Enjoy the view because it is about to disappear from your sight." With that he bent over and slid his boxers on.

"But I like your ass better," Brian said with a grin.

Pat looked startled and then he laughed which made Brian giggle.

"I like you," Pat said, "You speak what's on your mind. But right now I know you feel totally frustrated. Been there, done that."

Brian bit his lip, he was frustrated. "Pat...are you gay?"

Pat smiled. "Honestly? I've been both ways."

"Do I have a nice body?"

"For your age, it looks fine," he replied.

"Do you want to see it?"

"If you want to show me, but don't think it will turn me on, Brian. Come back when I'm sober and I'll draw you alone if you like."

Brian stood up and pulled his shirt off. He could see a change come over Pat's face as those eyes drank in the details. Finally Brian stood naked before the artist.

"You're comfortable with your body, that's good in a model. Turn around for me," Pat asked.

Brian did a slow three-sixty as the eyes traveled up and down his body. His cock was aroused but there was no shame in revealing it to this man.

"Puberty has been kind to you, my man."

"But I haven't had any real sex yet, maybe Alan will do it," Brian suggested.

Pat laughed, "Maybe...huh? Look, Brian, I'm an artist. That means I can use my mind to draw most anything, even if it isn't actually happening. You won't need to have sex for me to draw it."

"What? But that's cheating..."

"You want me to set you up, is that it? I should go pimping you to Alan so you can have your first sexual experience? What do you know about that anyway?"

Brian blushed again. "Nothing really."

Pat sighed. "Sex takes some getting used to, especially our kind. It's painful if you're not careful. I can't believe that you haven't found someone your age out there that isn't willing..."

"I don't want that," Brian said. "I want a guy like you to teach me."

Pat smiled, already aware of those desires. "It can't happen like you want...sorry. Even if there weren't laws against it, you're fifteen and that's too young to understand what a man needs."

Brian started to pick up his clothes. "I'd better go," he said.

"I could tell you what I know...but I can't touch you," Pat said.

Instead of saying "How is that possible?" Brian smiled and said "When do we start?"