

## Chapter Twelve

### MILESTONES IN LIFE

Adam was turning eighteen and Brian decided something needed to be done about it. The boy's father wouldn't do anything special and eighteen is such an important age in a boy's life. He couldn't wait to reach that age. But he also knew nothing would make Adam happier than a party with friends.

The team would recognize his birthday, might even come up with a gift, but there would be no party. There were twenty boys on the squad now and that was too many birthdays for the whole organization to celebrate one after the other.

A small party would be nice. Sean would come, and he might even bring Mary along since they were sort of dating. Brian figured maybe a couple of guys from the team could be invited. But he didn't know any of the seniors at Adam's school and wasn't about to ask any older kids anyway.

It was Adam's last year of high school and he was excited about graduating at the end of the year, but not Brian. Being in different schools meant they didn't know many of the same people.

By his own admission, Adam was pretty much a loner at his school. Brian understood his reasons, there was so much that they both had to hide from the other kids. Being gay had always made him look inwards, and he didn't doubt that Adam felt much the same. All it would take was one wrong person to find out and life would become a nightmare.

And now that they had Liz in on their little secret, Brian couldn't forget about her. She would have to help him figure out what needed to be done for this party.

"A party for Adam, that's sweet. When's his birthday?" She asked when he showed up at her door.

"Uh, next weekend, I'm afraid."

"Brian...that doesn't give us any time at all. Oh brother, boys just don't get it do they?"

"Sorry, Liz. Will you help me?"

"Of course I will. Have we got any money?"

"I have seventeen dollars," Brian said. "Will that be enough?"

"For maybe eight people, ten if we don't serve sodas. Can we get your mom to help us?"

"She's good for the cake and ice cream, I already asked her," Brian said.

"Have you bought him a present?" Liz asked.

"I'm not sure what to get him. I'm sorry...I've screwed this up already."

"He will love anything you give him, Brian." She sighed. "He loves you, silly, he'd settle for a box of rocks."

"I was thinking about a chain with a crucifix on it," Brian said.

"A gold chain? Good idea, but just a plain cross. Methodists don't show the crucifixion like we do in our church. I'm sure he'll adore it. Should we serve food?"

The conversation went on as Liz took notes. She decided that her mom would help out too and so he knew they would have great food. Sean agreed to come and said he would love to bring Mary along. So did Ben Molnar, Sean's intern. Adam liked Ben, a

relationship formed under the pressure Sean and Brian had placed upon them both in the practice rooms.

Ben was another of the Hungarian kids in the neighborhood and Liz knew his family quite well so she invited his sister Marta as well. That made seven and that seemed just big enough for a decent party in the Mahoney living room.

Keeping it all a secret from Adam was the best part. It was made easier because the boy was always coming over to the house on Saturday after practice anyway.

"My dad said he won't be home this weekend. He's going to D.C. for some party weekend thing," Adam said.

Brian smiled, wishing he could say something about the party. But Adam didn't seem sad about his relationship with his father anymore. His solitary life had been turned upside down and time spent with Brian went a long way towards keeping him happy. He was over so much Brian's parents had begun to think of him as another one of their children.

Thursday night meant choir practice. After a long day at school all Brian wanted to do was go home and relax, but that wasn't going to happen. Adam had taken to walking home with him since Pullman was still considered a problem. It meant Adam was always there waiting when Brian got out. Just knowing the boy would be outside left Brian staring at the clock in his last period history class.

"Liz says Hi," Adam said as they met.

"Liz, where did you see her?" Brian asked.

"She was going over to the church just as I got here. Said it was something to do with the priest and your choir practice. Hey, she says you guys raised four hundred dollars at that bake sale. Way to go."

"I didn't do a thing except eat the profits. But yeah, we have a concert scheduled now at the Soldier's Home the weekend before Halloween. That's a week after my birthday," Brian said.

"Cool, can I come?"

"Sure, that would be fun."

Adam paused and Brian smiled, knowing what was coming. "My birthday is Saturday," he said.

"Yeah, I know. Already got you covered," Brian said.

"You got me a present?" he asked.

"Sure did, but you don't get it until Saturday."

"What is it, can't you tell me? Please?"

The little kid in Adam came out when he got excited and Brian almost told him.

"No...you'll just have to wait."

"Aw, that's no fun."

Brian laughed. The boy was just so cute. "Yes it is. I love torturing you."

"Liz invited me to your practice tonight. Can I come?" Adam asked.

"It's pretty boring, but you're welcome anytime."

In fact, it was a great idea. Adam had been pestering him about singing ever since that afternoon in the living room. Brian hadn't repeated that private performance and maybe he was a bit shy about showing off his voice. But those feelings vanished when he was standing up in the choir loft. On Sundays it didn't matter that hundreds of people were listening, they always seemed so far away and God always seemed much closer.

But soon Brian knew he would be on a stage for these touring concerts and it seemed the shyness would have to be faced. Boxing was a different matter entirely. There was only one opponent and he was always trying his best to hurt you. Brian had no choice but to perform inside the ring.

"We're already working on the Christmas program," Brian said. "Maybe Father Dominic will let you play Silent Night."

Adam blushed. "I don't play good enough," he said.

"Yes you do. I'll sing it better if you play."

Adam sighed and Brian knew he would do it. "I'll try," Adam said.

And Dominic seemed delighted that someone else could play while he conducted the choir and Adam agreed to play for the whole practice. Dominic's musical talents at the piano weren't as strong as his faith that God would somehow get him through it. But he loved directing, arms waving and his whole body moving with the beat of the music.

Brian was so proud of Adam's ability to read music that he didn't give a thought to how difficult it might be. Liz sat beside Adam and turned the pages as he practiced before the rehearsal. It felt so good knowing that his two friends had developed their own relationship and seemed to enjoy working together.

Everything went well until they got to some of the Mass parts where Adam seemed unsure of himself. But rather than quit he resorted to simplifying his parts, playing chords when the melody fingering defeated him.

But that was ok too, Dominic had done far worse. The choir knew the music and it all sounded much the same. Adam seemed to play best during the solos, his eyes leaving the pages of the music to look up at Brian with a smile. Silent Night had never sounded better and Dominic beamed with delight.

"Your friend has real talent," he confided, "do you think he will come and play for us again."

"If you ask him," Brian said. "I think he would like nothing better."

"How come I haven't seen him in church before?"

"He's a Methodist, Father. Give me time...I'll win him over to our side."

And Brian truly believed that he could. If they worshiped the same God, the choice of church didn't matter that much.

It had never been more evident than the first night Adam spent at his house. After making up the spare bed to satisfy Mrs. Mahoney, Adam was about to crawl in with him when Brian said there was something to do first. He knelt at the end of the bed and Adam dropped down beside him.

"You pray every night?" he asked.

"Since I was a little kid," Brian said. "It must work, you're here."

"You pray for me?"

"I pray for all my friends, everyone in my life...and especially you," Brian said. It was true. He had been praying for Adam even before they declared their love.

"And who prays for you?" he asked.

"I hope my parents do," Brian said

"I'll pray for you," Adam said and that had been the way it was ever since. Kneeling with him all those nights, Brian had begun to believe that their shared prayers meant something great for them both. It didn't matter what name a person called their God, it was the act of saying His name which blessed them all.

Religion was still a great curiosity and it seemed like Brian was always searching for the truth, but there were so many truths it seemed. "Scratch a Christian and you'll find a Jew underneath," his mother said once. But if you scratched a Jew what would you find? Religion wasn't taught in his Church, it was force fed. Brian's personal life as a homosexual wasn't accepted and yet he still embraced the church. If that ever came up how could he ever hope to convince Adam that they were on the right path?

Growing up Catholic meant accepting the teachings of the faith, a dogma that Brian often found at odds with his own thoughts. Adam was like a blank page when it came to religion. His father had not attended any church. Naming himself a Methodist meant little except that Adam had been taken to Sunday services by his devout mother when she was alive.

But faith was something he craved, Brian could tell. Being able to communicate that thought wasn't so difficult. And night after night, Adam prayed with him and for him. An act so selfless and sweet that it only made Brian adore him even more. God had finally answered his plea for love and the boy had kept faith in Him. The reward was never more evident than in the love he shared with Adam.

But Saturday's boxing practice brought a new surprise when Hanson asked him to spar against Adam.

"Let's see if he can use what he's learned against you," Hanson said. "And Brian, don't back off just because you might be afraid to hurt your friend. I rather expect he'll work hard to defeat you if he thinks you're taking it easy on him. His advantage of height and weight will keep you on your toes I expect."

Brian saw the logic in what he was saying. Adam wouldn't want him to go all soft and loving in the ring. This wasn't hugs and kisses time...that was for later. Adam smiled shyly but it was so totally fake.

"You gonna hit me hard?" he asked.

"Damn right. I want to see if I've been wasting my time," Brian said.

He grinned. "I won't hurt anything you might need later on tonight."

"Oh, I am so gonna kick your ass," Brian said and grinned back.

"Ok, you girls finished gossiping yet?" Mr. Wayne asked. "We are trying to get some ring time here today."

They gloved up and Mr. Wayne strapped on the headgear. Two rounds meant that Brian would have time to plan a strategy after the first go at Adam, but then that meant the boy had the same advantage. His physical strength was approaching its peak and it would be a hard fight if he remembered all the skills Brian had taught him. But then Brian knew he would, Adam was ready for this level of competition.

Hanson came in the ring with them and gave the usual warnings before dropping his hand to begin the round. Adam danced back and forth, showing Brian he was still nervous about being here. Brian had better skill, more experience, but Adam had the reach by a few inches. Brian had planned to keep him on defense for the first round so he started with a series of combos aimed at the sides of Adam's head.

Adam kept his gloves up, blocking the blows from ever reaching his head. Brian shifted immediately into a one-two aimed at the stomach and managed several blows before Adam danced away, forcing Brian to follow. But he saw Adam's body language and caught the shift as the boy stopped running away and came back, fists swinging.

Brian took most of the blows on the shoulders and elbows as he used his arms to fend off the attack. Then Adam threw a straight arm punch at Brian's head, the glove skimming off the headgear as he turned away from the blow. Without thinking Brian lead with a left towards the right side of Adam's face, using the opening the punch had afforded. Adam's gloves went up to block and that opened up his right side. Brian popped a quick blow against Adam's chin and then backed off rather than pursue the momentary advantage.

Adam certainly thought Brian was taking it easy on him and he came back strong, the hit only seeming to wake him up to the possibilities of their fight. He gave Brian several of his well practiced body blows and these were countered with a few of the same followed by Brian tapping his chin and a follow up on the cheek. Hanson blew the whistle.

Brian stood against the ropes in his corner and looked over at Adam. The boy fought well, but then it was hard to beat what he had been had taught to do. Given time and experience the boy was going to be a class A fighter. Brian was only glad that they were on the same team in more ways than one. After a minute of break, Hanson called them back to the center and dropped his hand.

Adam was more aggressive from the start. Working Brian towards a corner, he tried to trap him against the ropes. Brian danced out, bobbing and weaving he ducked under Adam's first series of heavy blows. In a real fight he would never win fights by running away from his opponent. But Adam needed to see what it was like to chase someone down just to win a fight.

Adam began matching Brian's footwork, making glove contact every chance he got. Brian had told him never to hold back for that one big swing. Some guys thought they would end the match with one big hit but it never won them anything. It was a hard thing to master with the temptation to score a win so quickly.

Brian finally re-engaged with Adam and they traded body blows. Now Brian finally understood how that damn bag felt, Adam had a concise method of hitting the bag and he was using it now. Brian swung in under Adam's arm and popped his chin again. Too many of those and the boy wouldn't be eating any cake tonight.

Not that he made it easy. Adam's defense was always right on. He tried to rattle Brian's cage and went back at it, trying for head blows, forcing the both of them to keep their gloves high. It was a bad move on his part, Jamaal could have told him that much.

Brian was willing to take a few head blows in order to get at an opponent's nose, but instead he hit Adam in the forehead. Someone else could break his nose, but not Brian. Hanson blew the whistle, they were done.

They climbed out of the ring and stood together before Mr. Wayne as he took off the gear.

"My stomach hurts," Brian said.

"You had me seeing double," Adam admitted. "Why didn't you hit me in the nose, you had the shot?"

"You know I could have, that's the point. No sense in giving Mr. Wayne any more work to do," Brian said.

"But you could have," Adam insisted. "You should have taken the shot."

"I didn't hold anything back, Adam. It was my choice to make. Just making you bleed wouldn't teach either of us anything. You'll get plenty of bloody noses down the road. Just be happy you made me work for every bit of it, ok?"

"You did fine, Adam," Mr. Wayne said. "I saw Brian working out there. Just because you can do a thing doesn't always make it right, he knows that. You do what it takes to win and he likely scored the most points in the match. The rest is just silly pride. You'll be ready for the next tournament I imagine. Plenty of time to get busted up if that's what you need."

"You think I'm ready?" Adam asked.

"One way to find out, ain't there?" Mr. Wayne said.

"Yes sir...thanks."

It made his day when everyone started singing Happy Birthday and presented him with a team jacket. It was their ritual of naming him one of the A team. Adam was now in that exclusive group of members who were ready to take on opponents in the name of the club. Watching this, Brian knew how a mother bird felt when her babies finally took flight and left the nest. Adam was ready to find out what his patience and skill had earned him.

On the walk to Brian's house Adam asked if he was really ready for a tournament. His fingers kept tracing the outline of the embroidery on the front of the jacket. It showed the silhouette of a boxer standing over the CBBL logo. Brian would have to get Adam's name stitched over the right breast just as he had on his own jacket.

"Mr. Wayne wouldn't let you in a tourney unless you were ready, Adam. But if you're worried about it that's a good thing."

"Yeah, I'm worried. But I shouldn't be, right? You taught me everything you know."

"There's only one thing I didn't teach you because you already know it inside. Take it from me, you're gonna go a long way. Feels good when all the sweat and pain pays off, doesn't it?"

They climbed the front steps to the house and Adam looked as if he were on top of the world. Everything had gone right today, but there was more. Brian opened the door and everyone was standing in the hall.

"Happy Birthday," they all yelled. And Adam was floored.

Brian's parents hugged Adam and so did Liz. Bill, Ben and Sean had been at practice but snuck out early to get there before them. Even Mary looked good, while Ben's sister Marta stood quietly in the background.

Adam was amazed and embarrassed at so much attention, but he thanked everyone for coming and the party started. Liz's mom was in the kitchen pulling food from the oven, but when she came over to say good-bye Brian asked her to stay and join in the fun.

Brian didn't think Adam had been the focus of so much attention in quite a while and he seemed to be enjoying himself as he opened the presents. Every few minutes Adam looked up at him with a grin on his face and Brian knew what he was thinking. The gold chain hung around his neck and it looked good there. Brian had chosen the right present.

After a wonderful dinner they had cake and ice cream, once again singing the Birthday song as Adam blew out the candles. When they were all out Adam looked up with glee, and Brian felt a lump in his throat. The greatest gift given today was the happiness he saw on Adam's face.

Brian told everyone that Liz had made all the arrangements and she got a round of applause for her efforts. In all it was a great party, but he couldn't wait for it to end.

Sean and Mary were the first to leave since he had to walk her home. It was good having him there and Brian told him so. Sean seemed to feel much the same and that meant a lot to them both. Brian had begun to see his friend's relationship with Mary as something they both needed.

The rest of them left shortly afterwards and the boys began to clean up the living room before the Mahoney's left for the 10 o'clock mass.

"Can we go too?" Adam asked.

"To mass? You want to go to mass?" Brian asked.

"Yeah...I have a lot to be thankful for," he said.

They sat in the back as a sleepy Father Connor went through the service. Adam stared about the inside of the church and whispered questions in Brian's ear. He could see his parents up front in their usual place amidst their friends and so he held Adam's hand as he tried to explain about the mass and its symbolism.

At one point Adam knelt beside him and Brian watched the boy's lips move silently. If only these people around them knew how much he loved this boy, Brian thought. But God surely knows and it doesn't matter to Him. He's probably just glad they came.

On the short walk home Brian asked Adam what he'd prayed for.

"I prayed for my brother and my father. Today I am eighteen and they are missing out on all the joy I feel. I felt closer to God in that church and that's what it's all about, isn't it?"

"Yes, church is a place to remind us of God. But it's only a building, no matter how pretty it looks. A long time ago I decided that the real church is inside the people. It's why I like singing to them."

"I prayed for you too, Brian."

"I know Adam, you're the reason I know God loves me."

Home after mass, Brian's parents settled down to watch the late news and the boys went to bed. Brian climbed in bed and settled down beside Adam.

"I just wanted God to see how much I love you," Adam said in the darkness. "I want him to look after us even though we might do things that the Bible says are wrong. I don't think we'll ever do anything so wrong that God gives up on us. I don't want to ask for forgiveness because I don't see any sin in us. I see only love in my heart and the need to share it with you. Amen."

Brian was close to tears at the sincerity of that prayer. And so they finally came to share what was in their hearts. Adam may have been through so much in life and yet he knew how to be tender when he needed it most.

It had been Adam's choice to make and Brian would be forever grateful that he had been chosen. Only hours before the boy had been willing to punish him in the ring and now that strength was renewed in their loving embrace. Brian would always look back on this moment with wonder.

Staggering his way into the bathroom early the following morning, Brian felt the soreness down there, back there, well...just about everywhere. He stood under the hot shower with this silly grin on his face. Oh yeah, he had finally made love to a real man.

Adam lay asleep in bed and Brian stood looking down on him with pride. Everything this boy had become touched him in some way. He might be only sixteen but

Brian knew this was something he would never experience again in quite the same way. The world was constantly changing but he wanted to cling to this moment. This image of Adam at peace was something he wanted to burn into his mind and carry forever.

And as the sounds of his parents moving around downstairs reached his ears, Brian leaned over and kissed Adam on the cheek to wake him. Breakfast would be upon them and then he would sing for Adam at the mass. For even as Brian felt that his voice was a gift from God, he also knew that Heaven would understand if he dedicated his joy of singing to the one he loved.

"You have to shower," Brian said as Adam opened his eyes. "This room smells like a whore house after last night. Come on, you better hurry."

Adam smiled and rolled out of bed. He grinned and Brian looked at him standing there in all his glory just as his mom knocked on the door. He had a towel around his waist, Adam wore nothing but that grin.

"Breakfast, boys. Hurry up or you'll be late for church."

Thank goodness she didn't open the door. Brian had completely forgotten to lock it when he came back from the bathroom. He grabbed a pair of boxers from the bureau and handed Adam the towel.

"You better hide that thing," Brian said. "I don't want you to scare my mother to death."

Adam showered and then Brian watched him dress before they went downstairs.

"How did you like the mass last night?" Mrs. Mahoney asked when they sat down at the table.

"Fine, Mrs. Mahoney, you have a beautiful church," Adam said.

"Well, thank you, you're welcome to come with us anytime you want."

"I want to hear Brian sing today. He says his voice sounds different because of the church."

"It sounds much better than what he sings in the shower," Mr. Mahoney said.

"What none of you know is that there's a spot up in the loft where the shape of the church throws my voice against the wall behind the altar," Brian said.

"That sounds cool," Adam said.

"Yeah, we don't use microphones or anything. I would love to record the sound someday," Brian said.

"Really? My brother has a portable recorder, maybe I can bring it over sometime," Adam said. "I'll have to ask my dad."

"You have an older brother?" my mother asked.

"Yeah, he's away in the Army," Adam replied.

It was the lie he told everyone because it was easier to explain than the truth.

"We should ask Father Connor first, he is kind of fussy," Brian said.

"Now Brian, that was unkind," his mother said. "It would have been more polite to say that he's just used to his old ways."

"Sounds like the same thing to me," his father said with a grin.

"Don't you start," his mother laughed. "Come on, we'll be late."

Adam sat with the parents towards the front, a place where he could watch Brian sing. And as Brian stood forward on the spot and looked out at the congregation he saw Adam down there, his head turned back to look up. And Brian sang *Dona Nobis Pacem*, give us peace, like he had never sung it before.

The lower tones of his high tenor voice seemed more powerful today. The rush of emotion washing through his body was always a thrill but today it was different. He was closer to God here than at any other time in his daily life. The gift of song was all Brian had to offer but He accepted it with open arms. Give us peace, Brian thought as his eyes gazed down on the smile Adam bestowed upon him.

### SMALL TRIUMPHS

Eleventh grade had always seemed like a special place to Brian until he was in it. This was supposed to be the year of that child to man transition period, the leap that climaxed senior year.

So here he was, one of the small men on campus without any of the benefits the older kids enjoyed. Somewhere there was an unwritten rule that eleventh graders didn't associate with the upperclassmen. As for Brian, his love was a senior...so much for those rules.

Adam was studying trigonometry while Brian was still mastering the basics of algebra, or trying to anyway. He had replaced the desk in his room with a table and two chairs so they could do homework together. It didn't turn out to be the quality time he expected but at least they were together.

Adam had almost become a member of the Mahoney family for several reasons. His father had slid into almost total drug addiction and Adam couldn't stand being around him. It didn't take much of an explanation to his parents for Brian to win them over. His Uncle Frank on mom's side had been a notorious drunk and the family had suffered with that until his untimely death several years before.

Feeling it was their Christian duty, they told Adam he was welcome anytime and that he was to stay as long as he wished. It was the best of solutions but with some unexpected consequences. Nothing dramatic, but Adam had quirks and in all fairness so did Brian. They both adjusted to make it work out. But nothing overrode the additional time they now had for their love life.

"Adam, did you leave the toilet seat up again?" Brian asked.

"Oh, sorry," was his usual response.

"Adam, where's the cap for the toothpaste?"

"Oh, sorry...here."

Half the time he used Brian's toothbrush anyway. That didn't signify much since his tongue was in Brian's mouth much of the time anyway. At least they both had clean teeth. But Brian found himself chasing down rolls of toilet paper, washcloths and errant towels in the name of love.

But it was totally sweet to wake beside Adam, the warmth of a stiff morning wood pressed against his stomach and soft snores telling him the boy was still at peace with the world. It was times like these that Brian absolved him of any wrongdoing in life.

And then there was the good this boy brought into their world. Adam had carried over his brother's recording equipment, it took him three trips but he never asked for help. Brian was pretty sure he was ashamed of his home life. Running into Adam's father was not something Brian looked forward to anyway. Besides, he was sure that Adam hadn't asked to use the stuff, not that his brother was going to need it anytime soon.

They set up at night in the practice room before the choir arrived. There were cords run all over the place and Brian counted six microphones.

"You really know how to use this stuff?" he asked.

"Plugging it in is the easy part, making it perform the way I want is difficult." Adam admitted. "Just ignore me tonight and let me see what I can come up with."

Ignore him? Hardly possible since Brian was still at the stage where he couldn't believe Adam was his in the first place. How could he be so lucky?

But they sang as Adam sat in the corner with his headphones on and tweaked the little knobs and buttons. The equipment was probably worth a fortune, but then the brother had been a drug dealer too so that probably didn't figure in when he bought the stuff. The lure of easy cash had always been there for so many of Brian's peers, but never for any of his friends.

When practice was over they all gathered around to see what Adam had accomplished.

"It's ok, but that's all," Adam said. "This room is terrible for recording."

"Maybe it would sound better in the church?" Dominic said.

"Could we...?" Adam asked.

"Let me talk to Father Connor," he said.

But Adam didn't want to do it during a mass, he wanted a special time set aside and the Monsignor agreed. The following Thursday's practice would be in the church and Adam seemed pleased. But as they took down the microphones and rolled up the cables to pack in Mrs. Mahoney's shopping cart, Adam handed Brian the headphones.

"This sounded particularly sweet," he said turning on the recorder.

In the headphones Brian heard this voice singing and realized it was himself. Did he sound like that? The notes seemed to float above the choir and suddenly Brian became entranced. All these years he had never heard himself sing unless it was thrown back to him from the walls of the church.

"I...I sound like this?" he asked and Adam nodded.

"You could sing professionally," he said. "Wait until I get you in the church, then you'll see."

Mr. Mahoney was so enthralled by the idea of a recording that he offered to pay Adam for a copy. "And I imagine a good number of the parishioners would love to buy a recorded copy of their choir singing, will it be that good?" he asked.

"I'll do my best," Adam said, and Brian knew he would.

The following Thursday afternoon they came home from school and set about hauling the recording stuff down to the church. Adam borrowed some longer cables from the rectory and set himself up in the center of the church with microphones spread out all over the place.

"If I capture the sound from several different sources I can put it all back together the way I want to," he said.

Brian had no idea what he was talking about but helped out the best he could in setting things up before the choir arrived. The Mahoney's arrived with supper in a bag and they all sat down on the front steps of the church to eat.

"Where did you learn how to do all this recording business, Adam?" Mr. Mahoney asked.

"My mother worked at a radio station when we lived in New Jersey. I used to tag along sometimes. They had a recording studio there and the engineers began showing me things I wanted to know about," he explained. "But that was a while back, after my parents split up."

Brian knew his father regretted asking the question now after Adam's more than honest answer, but then his mother took up the cause.

"You're very much a part of our family now," she said, "and we wouldn't have it any other way."

"If this turns out like you hope maybe there is a future in the music business for you," Mr. Mahoney added.

"I was really thinking about a career as a boxer," Adam said. "But only if Brian thinks I should."

"You can do anything you want," Brian said. "I know Mr. Hanson thinks you've made great progress and Lord knows I won't want to face you in the ring the next couple of years."

Fortunately the choir began to arrive before Mrs. Mahoney had the chance to put in her two cents on the subject. There were more than a few onlookers this evening and Adam became worried that they might get picked up in his equipment during the recording. But Dominic did the honors of telling everyone they would have to be silent during the practice or face the consequences. Your basic shut up or leave routine.

The doors were closed just as Liz arrived and the organist warmed up so Adam could take some sound levels. He nodded when everything seemed right and the rehearsal began. From up in the loft Brian could see Adam and Liz down at the table but the boy was engrossed in the machines and seemed to ignore everything else.

As agreed, they performed almost every song they knew. Much of it was material from the mass but some of the songs were pieces they were planning to perform on the tour. This meant Brian had four solos to sing along with the ten other pieces by the entire choir. It was a pretty heavy load for the young voices and there was a great sigh of relief when it was over.

Brian hurried down the stairs and walked down the aisle towards Adam. The boy was winding back the tape which he finally stopped after a minute.

"Did it go well?" Brian asked.

"Judge for yourself," Adam said. Liz plugged in a cable on the side of the recorder and gave them a nod and a smile.

The onlookers waited curiously as Adam turned a few dials and started the playback. From the speakers at the front of the church came the sound of the choir singing the *Dona Nobis Pacem* from the mass. Brian couldn't believe it. Did they sound that good? The smile on Adam's face told him the truth.

"Amazing, isn't it?" he asked.

"We sound like that?" Brian said and the other choir boys seemed just as stunned.

"That's real good," Mr. Mahoney said, "I'll bet everyone here wants a copy."

There were a lot of parents in that crowd and each of them asked Adam to make them a copy. By the time practice broke up Liz had seventeen names on a sheet of paper and each of them promised ten dollars for the recording. It would mean a lot of work but Adam was just happy that his effort had paid off.

"Brian, you and your parents have to hear this one song before we take this stuff apart. Let me find it first."

The Mahoney's sat back down and waited as Adam rolled the tape. And then the sound of the choir came through the speakers once again and Brian's voice could be heard moving into his solo in the Kyrie Eliason.

The sound sent a shiver through Brian's body as he heard himself sing. The notes seemed to roll off the walls as he became swept up in the feeling he had put forth during this piece. He glanced over at Adam and saw the boy was staring at him, eyes wide in amazement at what he was hearing.

Even after all the time he had complained about their music being in Latin, Brian had to admit that the music of the Church was probably the best he ever performed. And as the high notes of his voice faded away at the end he realized that his voice was indeed God's greatest gift.

There was silence for a moment and then Mrs. Mahoney spoke.

"I'd like ten copies of your recording, Adam. I'll pay for each of them," she said. "You have no idea how many in our family will treasure these songs once they hear them."

And Mr. Mahoney told Adam that he would put up the money for the tapes they need to meet all the orders. He expected that Adam would have to make at least fifty cassettes if he was going to meet the demand. And that was when the Mahoney's gave up their den for Adam to use as a recording studio. They all began rolling all the cords up and packing everything to take home. For if Adam ever had any doubts, the Mahoney home was now his as well.

The cassettes took Adam all week to make and Brian helped him deliver them. They brought home close to four hundred dollars that weekend, a sum like neither of them had ever seen before.

It was Adam's cash and Brian held no say in how the boy was planning to spend it, but his choice surprised everyone.

Approaching Mrs. Mahoney in the kitchen on Sunday morning, Adam reached in his pocket and handed her the money.

"What's this all about?" she asked.

"I owe Mr. Mahoney a hundred of that for the cassettes and the rest I want you to keep. Call it payment for all you've done for me."

"Now Adam, that's sweet, but you don't owe us anything," she said.

"Yes I do. I eat your food and you wash my clothes. Then there's the heat and electricity bills, I cost you money. Please, I want you to have it."

She looked at him and Brian saw tears form in her eyes. There wouldn't be any argument but Brian knew what she would do with the money. And Monday when they got home from practice she sat Adam down at the kitchen table. From her purse she produced a savings booklet from the bank.

"I've put the money in a safe place for your future. I want you to add to it when you can, but never take anything out unless it's an emergency. One day you'll want to start a business or pay for college classes and the money will be there. Each of my children has an account, and now you do too."

Adam seemed shocked that she hadn't taken the money away from him, but he was beginning to see that Mrs. Mahoney wasn't someone to argue with either. Brian only laughed when Adam expressed his surprise later that night in their room.

"You have to expect things like that from Mom," Brian said. "Her father died when she was little and the family suffered because he didn't leave them any money. She's been saving in the bank ever since, although you wouldn't know it, we might even be rich someday."

"I never had any money saved up before," Adam said. "After my father lost his job we were damn near starving all the time so my mother had to work just to feed us. There was never any savings, but she kept the family going. I think your mother is so cool for doing this."

"I don't think she'd mind if you called her Mom occasionally; that is if you want to."

"She really is, isn't she? It's like she wants us to be brothers or something," Adam said.

"That would make you a brother-fucker, wouldn't it?"

Adam grabbed for him but Brian ducked away, knocking over the lamp and sending the bureau skidding across the floor. Brian laughed as Adam finally got a hand on his leg and pulled him off his feet. They both hit the floor with a thud.

"Hey...what's going on up there," Brian's father called up the stairs.

"Adam is trying to kill me," Brian screeched as the boy grabbed his crotch.

"Well, try and kill him quietly will you, Adam? The news is on down here." Brian could hear his father laughing as he went back into the living room.

"I'm gonna kill you with love," Adam hissed. Brian cracked up as his clothes were pulled off.

"You'd better lock the door first," Brian said and Adam did just that.