

Chapter Fourteen

FAME AND FORTUNE

The five of them sat crowded into the studio control room as Evan cued up the final master tape. The Mahoney's and Adam were going to hear the final mix before anyone else and they were thrilled.

"Ok, here is the opening cut," Evan said as the tape rolled.

For the next fifty minutes they were amazed at how well the choir sounded. These were the 'American songs,' as Brian liked to call them. It was one of the best ensemble performances the boy's choir had ever given. And the studio touch had blended the voices so naturally.

They were taking a chance releasing two recordings at once, but Brian felt it was important to give people a choice. Traditional American music could be played anytime. But the Christmas music was only seasonal, and much of what they had recorded was heard mostly in Catholic churches. The two differing types of their music would certainly broaden their appeal.

"Now we get to the Christmas music, and I think this is your best work," Evan said. And then he turned to look back at Brian. "You know, when Father Connor called me, at first I thought this would be something simple to work on. But this has been a real challenge and a great pleasure. I predict you kids will have a great hit with this particular album. And someday I would love to get Brian in here to do a solo recording, if that's all right with everyone."

Brian blushed at the attention but it also excited him. Evan smiled and then laughed, "Scary isn't it? But you would do just fine with the right music."

"We'll have to talk about this later," Bill Mahoney said, "But I'm sure you've got his attention."

Evan rolled the tape and again they sat spellbound as the voices of the choir surrounded them. The mix downplayed the sounds of the piano accompaniment and allowed the voices to blend. It was this sound that Brian heard whenever they sang in the choir loft and it seemed the most natural thing. The acoustics of the hall had been a blessing.

But he sat in anticipation until ever so gently Adam put his hand on Brian's shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. The opening notes of the organ rang from the speakers and for the first time Brian realized how clear the piece sounded. Inside his head he could almost hear the boys in the choir humming their cue notes behind him that night in the church.

The clarity of his voice sounded like the tones of a bell as the 'Ave Maria' track reached his solo. This was the sound that had resounded through the church that night, the voice that the small audience of friends and parents had heard. Brian had never heard himself like this, but it was good, it was really good.

As he listened, Brian remembered looking down at Jesus on the cross and thinking of Gabriel the first time he had sung this piece. But that was before Adam had come into his life. In this recording his eyes had stayed glued to Adam sitting at that table beside the altar. It had never seemed so important, but on that night he had to sing his very best. And it seemed God had been listening, he was hearing the proof of that.

"Wow," was Evan's comment when the song was over, "You sing like that all the time?"

"He can," Adam said, and Brian could see the boy was close to tears. "He just needs to find the right inspiration."

"I'm really proud of you, son," Bill Mahoney said.

"We both are," Alice agreed.

"It was difficult to mix," Evan said. "Fortunately, Adam gave each microphone its own track so we could boost or tone down what we needed. A good trick if all you have is a basic four track."

"Next time I want to run at least sixteen tracks on a live recording," Adam said.

"You come see me first and I'll set you up, ok?" Evan said. "Now how many of these babies are we going to produce, a thousand or more?"

"It's closer to four thousand at this point," Adam said, "But I don't think we've even begun to receive the full order yet."

"Yeah, I'll bet," Evan said. "I saw you guys on television last week, pretty impressive."

The television crew's presence at mass had been as disruptive as Father Connor predicted. It took a good while for the congregation to settle in before the mass because the church was packed to overflowing.

The crew had moved their camera all over the church and had almost followed the processional down the center aisle but had been stopped by the ushers. They retreated into the lobby of the church until the mass ended.

After the mass, Father Connor allowed Mr. Devers and Miss Lawrence to take over the church. The choir was arranged on the altar and they stood singing under the bright lights while the cameras rolled. This was followed by Miss Lawrence interviewing Father Dominic and Father Connor before the lights went out and the event was over.

Fortunately, Bill Mahoney had taken a dozen photos of the choir standing before the altar and Brian was hoping the shots would be good enough to put on the back cover. He and Adam had agreed it would be best to use a simple photo since there was nothing fancy about the choir. They didn't want the whole thing to look too slick. This had to look like a home-grown effort; it was part of their appeal.

And by Thursday the photos were back from the drugstore. They looked good enough to use so they chose two slightly different ones and Brian promised his father credit on the cover. But that was also the day Patrick came over to the house just before dinnertime.

Brian had never introduced Pat to his family or Adam for that matter. But when he told his parents that Pat had been the artist who drew the boxing picture with Sean they figured he was a friend of Coach Hanson. He was welcomed in the house and Brian couldn't take his eyes off the large portfolio case tucked under his arm. Only Brian knew what was inside. They all sat in the living room waiting for Pat to unveil his cover art.

"I tried my best to give you what you wanted," Pat said to Brian. "At first I thought it would be simple, but it wasn't. There are so many elements that came to mind, not the least of which is this place, the Bay.

"So I drew the church and your angel, but something was missing, something very important." He began to open the case and pulled out a large mounted drawing, covered

at the moment with a plain sheet. "And then it came to me several nights ago, the missing piece was you."

With that said Pat turned the blank sheet over and revealed the drawing. Brian almost choked from the rush of emotion that swept through him. Beside him he heard Adam gasp.

The silhouette of Saint Benedict's church stood dark and tall against a backlit night sky. Floating above the steps was the angel, its wings outstretched as if in flight. The flowing white robe billowed to one side and the head was turned upwards as if in answer to a call from the heavens. Indeed, there was a faint golden halo around that head, but the face, there was no mistaking that face. It was Gabriel, the eyes, the mouth and the flowing golden hair. Patrick had captured the very essence of the boy turned into one of God's divine creatures.

But then standing at the foot of the steps stood a boy. The angel seeming to hover just over his right shoulder. And despite the hood of a sweatshirt pulled up over the boy's head, the face peeked out enough to be identified, the boy was unmistakably Brian.

"Oh, my..." Mrs. Mahoney said. "It's beautiful."

And to Brian it was the finest thing he had ever seen Patrick create, and he had done the faces from memory alone. But was it right for the cover of their recording? Brian was humble enough to know that there would be talk if he was on the front cover alone.

In his mind, the angel had been meant to signify their singing to God, voices raised in worship, the purpose of the boy's choir. Patrick had turned that into a beautiful rendition of one boy and his love for an angel.

"You're quite an artist," Bill Mahoney said.

But Patrick was focused on Brian's reaction and he seemed pleased when a smile stretched across the boy's face. "It's awesome, Pat," Brian said. "It ought to hang on the wall in a gallery."

Patrick took the drawing over and stood it up on the mantle amidst Brian's boxing trophies. But when he turned back there was sadness on his face.

"It's too much, isn't it?" he asked.

"No...well, maybe for this Christmas album, yes," Brian admitted. "But I am going to do a solo recording in a few months and that is my album cover. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"I'm sorry..." Pat began.

"No, it's a beautiful drawing, but I'm only one boy in a choir of thirty. This will inspire me to make a better recording of my own. You did the right thing, it's everything I wanted and more," Brian said.

He threw his arms around Pat and they hugged for a few moments. Brian's parents stood up and looked closely at the drawing, admiring the craftsmanship of the piece. Only Adam sat silently on the couch.

Pat seemed pleased that Brian was happy with the piece. He politely refused a dinner invitation from the Mahoney's, pleading a previous engagement. Brian walked him out to the sidewalk and saw Sam waiting in the car a few doors down.

"I'll call you when I'm ready to make that album," Brian said. "I couldn't say this in front of my parents, but your drawing...it's the very thing I see in my dreams. How did you know?"

"I see him too, Brian. Our loss is God's gain, that's the easiest way to understand it. I've seen what this town can do to a boy like Gabriel, it's a terrible thing. But he's in a better, happier place. I feel that in my heart, don't you?"

"I know he is," Brian said. They hugged again and then Pat got in the car with Sam. Brian watched them drive away and suddenly he just had to see that drawing again.

His parents were in the kitchen when he walked back through the front door. But Adam was standing in front of the mantle, his eyes riveted on the drawing. Brian stood beside him and put his arm around Adam's waist.

"You didn't tell me he was so beautiful," Adam said, his voice hushed and full of emotion. "Now I understand the loss you must feel...what a waste of life."

"He wasn't meant for this world," Brian said. "There was no happiness in this life for him; nothing except the music we sang ever touched him. I understand that part of him, I really do. Look at his face, Patrick has captured the devotion he felt when he sang. That is how we should always remember him."

"It's a shame he couldn't understand how good a friend you were," Adam said.

"I saw only what he wanted me to see, I didn't really know the truth. It's taken me a long time to see that. I was in love with the image he projected. John finally got me to understand that."

Brian laid his head on Adam's shoulder and they stood looking at the angel, watching the creature take flight towards the heavens. It was where Gabriel belonged.

The television segment shown on Channel 20 had run at the end of the local evening news on Sunday night, a whopping four minutes long. The voice of Miss Lawrence laid out the scene as the camera followed the congregation through the doors of Saint Benedict's and into the church:

"The people of Curtis Bay have been attending Saint Benedict's Catholic Church for almost seventy-five years," she began. "One of the few remaining churches in the city that still celebrates a High Mass every Sunday, according to Monsignor Connor who performs the ancient ritual in celebration of Jesus Christ and reenacts the Last Supper. The congregation of Saint Benedict's has been inspired to attend all these years by the most amazing aspect of that ritual, the music of their boy's choir."

Then the procession of the priests, altar boys and the choir was spliced together over the sounds of the organ and the views of the faithful kneeling in the pews and crossing themselves as the crucifix passed them down the main aisle. A cutaway back to Miss Lawrence standing alone before the altar rail was inserted here because this was the point at which the ushers virtually had to push them from the church on Father Connor's orders.

"The faithful parishioners fill the pews every Sunday at ten o'clock to hear one of the best kept secrets of this church. Thirty youngsters practice religiously every week for this one moment and tonight we get to share their performance with you."

The organ swelled on the soundtrack as the camera angle zoomed back from a shot of Jesus hanging on the cross above the altar to show the full choir and Father Dominic standing behind the altar rail. The choir began to sing the 'Dona Nobis Pachem,' and they had barely performed one verse before the voice of Miss Lawrence interceded again, the choir singing on, but muted in the background.

"The boy's choir at Saint Benedict's has been the pride of this church for over fifty years, I've been told. And just this year the boys have taken their music on tour in celebration of the community in which they live."

The voices swell and the boys take back the full screen just as Brian, still standing in his front row position, takes his solo. The choir jumps back in and they fill the tiny television speaker with their sound. When the song ends, Miss Lawrence is back as the choir shifts into a medley of Christmas music beginning with "Little Town of Bethlehem."

"For those of you out there who can't find a moment to attend this beautiful service at Saint Benedict's, you'll be happy to know that the choir has just finished recording. A secular album of patriotic American music and a wonderful Christmas album will be available for purchase just before Thanksgiving. Channel 20 was fortunate enough to obtain an advance copy of these boys singing some of our Christmas favorites. We've just about worn out the tape down at the studios but I'm sure they can send you a copy if you call the parish house here at Saint Benedict's."

The voices bring the song to a finish and the camera pulls back, leaving the boys standing before the altar with Jesus and the towering stained glass windows on either side.

"For Channel 20 News, this is Melanie Lawrence." And the program cuts away to a car commercial. Four minutes is quite a long time for a news segment, but it was long enough to cause pure chaos at the rectory and the parish office the following week.

The first they knew of the problem was when a distraught Sister Mary called Mrs. Mahoney to inquire if they had firm release date on the albums. Alice informed her that the tapes were due in the Monday before the Thanksgiving holiday and the records were due in the following day. But wise in her knowledge of how the elderly sister would never ask directly, Alice asked if they needed help in answering the phones.

"Oh, yes, please. The phones here haven't stopped ringing since that television broadcast. We should have foreseen the demand but who could predict such an overwhelming appeal for our music? I've personally taken over two hundred orders in the past twenty-four hours, it's all I seem to have time for."

"Be assured, Sister, I'll be right over and I'll get my family involved right after they get home," Mrs. Mahoney said.

After she got off the phone with Sister Mary, Alice called in her troops. The bingo ladies and the bake sale club would take shifts every day for the next two weeks, the boys and Bill would be there in the evenings after school and work respectively.

In all there were thirty-four parishioners involved by the time the trucking company delivered one hundred and eighty boxes to the church two weeks later. Six thousand, three hundred and twenty cassette tapes arrived and within two days most of them were labeled, stamped and shipped all across the city. They breathed a sigh of relief and then went back to work, as the orders kept pouring in.

The local radio stations and music stores soon realized that they had a bunch of local celebrities on their hands and the choir's music was heard in radios all over town. The record stores begged for cases of the tapes to sell and the parish was only too glad to shift the responsibility to others.

When the flood had passed, Alice invited Father Dominic, Father Connor and Sister Mary to the house for dinner on a Friday night, the week after Thanksgiving. There was still leftover turkey in the refrigerator but she splurged, baking a whole salmon, since

Catholics didn't eat meat on this one day of the week. It was during the cocktail hour prior to the meal that Father Connor decided to lay down a few rules for any future successes.

But the wise man always gets his way with praise first. "I suppose we ought to congratulate ourselves on weathering this storm," he said to the gathered family and friends. He chuckled and then took a sip of his Tom Collins.

"It was an amazing feat and the teamwork was excellent. But I suppose I don't have to tell you we cannot be doing this every time you boys make an album. The bank tells me we have forty-eight thousand dollars and some change in the bank from this effort. Forty-eight thousand, an astounding sum of money. And I hear it isn't over yet. How many more recordings did you order?" Father asked Brian.

Brian turned to Adam who was keeping track of every piece of the inventory.

"We've sold over eight thousand copies so far and I have another six thousand on order before Christmas. That's only the Christmas music, the other one is doing well too. We've sold three thousand of the American music tapes, but the music stores expect that will pick up right after the holidays."

"Incredible. My congratulations once again. I see that a dozen scholarships are in the offering for this spring. Do you know what that will do for our parish? The Diocese will smile upon us and I expect we'll have some new blood in the school before long. I will get to hand pick a few people to run some of our programs. And finally we will get to sit back and enjoy the fruits of our labor."

"I'd still like to keep a hand in with the choir, Father," Dominic said.

"Certainly, someone has to run our pride and joy," the Monsignor laughed.

Alice saw his glass was empty and went out to the kitchen to fetch him another drink. The elder priest finally turned his attention to Brian and Adam.

"You boys have been a blessing to our church..." he began.

But Mrs. Mahoney stuck her head back in the room. "Excuse me, Father. Brian will you come here a minute?"

Brian rose and left the room so the Monsignor continued talking to Adam. In the kitchen, Brian's mother held up the empty bottle of Collins mix.

"I have to send you down to the store for another one of these," she said. Reaching in her purse she handed over a five dollar bill. "Hurry back, dinner will be ready in about fifteen minutes."

Brian grabbed his jacket and left for the corner store two blocks away. He was glad Father Connor was going to let Dominic stay with the choir. At least he was open to trying out more new music since the success of the Soldier's Home concert.

Brian hurried down the street to the store and pulled open the glass door, causing the little bell on the frame to jingle. Mr. Williams looked up from his register and smiled.

"Hello, Brian, see you have the good Fathers over at the house this evening," he said. No surprise there, the neighborhood always seemed to know who was doing what. "Sean is back there somewhere, if you want to chat."

Brian lifted a bottle of the Collins mix up off the shelf and left it on the front counter. He saw Sean down the far aisle and went down to talk.

"Hey, bud," Brian said.

"Killer B, what's up?" Sean replied.

"Father Connor and company are up at the house for dinner and mom sent me down here for some more soda. I'm afraid he's gonna try and convert Adam before the night is over."

"Poor Adam," Seam laughed. "Hey, my mom says thanks for the tape. You guys did an awesome job with that."

"Tell her she's welcome. We damn near drove the parish house crazy with that mess. I've got to rethink our sales for stuff like that in the future. The good Sisters looked like zombies last week before we were done."

"Zombie nuns, now I'd pay to see a movie like that," Sean said, and the both of them laughed at the image.

"Gotta run," Brian said. "Father needs another drink before dinner."

"See you at practice tomorrow," Sean said.

"Yeah, bud," Brian replied.

He paid Mr. Williams for the soda and took the bag. He pushed open the door and again heard the little bell tinkle. Outside he turned left and started walking towards home.

Brian was just passing the alley beside the store when a pair of hands reached out of the shadows and grabbed him. The bag went flying, the bottle smashing as it hit the sidewalk. Brian was spun around and slammed against the brick wall beside the dumpster.

He was stunned by the blow to the side of his face as it hit the wall. And then he saw the car parked in the alley. The blue car registered in his mind as the man behind him pushed him down to the ground. Brian felt his hands being yanked behind his back and the sound of handcuffs ratcheting closed around his wrists.

"Got you now, sweetie," Pullman said.

Brian opened his mouth to scream and felt a wad of cloth get stuffed between his teeth. Then he felt the cold hard barrel of a gun poked in his right ear.

"One sound and I'll send you off to join your buddy," Pullman said.

Pullman opened the back door of the unmarked car. He began pushing the boy towards the opening and Brian struggled. If the man got him in that car there would be no escape. Pullman grabbed the back of Brian's head and slammed the butt of his pistol against the back of the boy's head. Brian felt himself losing consciousness and the cop began to thrust his limp body into the backseat.

Suddenly the arms weren't holding him anymore and Brian slid off the seat and back out onto the broken pavement of the alley. Through the haze of what remained of his consciousness, Brian saw Adam pounding on the cop's face.

Not a word was said; the fight seemed surreal to Brian as he spit the rag out of his mouth and began to scream. Where had Adam come from? But Pullman was being treated like a punching bag as Adam slugged the man a half dozen times. And then as if from a great distance, Brian saw Pullman stumble and fall to the ground. When his hand came up, Brian saw the gun pointing at Adam and he screamed in fear.

The explosion of the shot echoed off the narrow walls of the alley and Brian saw Adam spin away and fall, lying across the sidewalk at the mouth of the alley. Pullman began to rise as Brian continued to scream for all he was worth. And then from nowhere the top of the detective's head split open and blood splattered everywhere as the man went limp and fell.

Pullman was down and Brian looked up to see Sean standing over the detective's body, the metal security bar from the store still in his hands.

"Adam," Brian yelled, "Adam..."

Sean went over to the boy lying on the sidewalk just as Mr. Williams and several of the neighbors arrived. Brian could hear the sound of sirens approaching in the distance and he struggled to stand on his feet, but he slipped down again.

Sean was beside him. "He's been shot, but he's breathing ok." Those were the only words Brian heard before he blacked out.

He awoke to find himself lying on a stretcher in the back of an ambulance. The flashing lights of a half-dozen cop cars flashed across the metal walls and ceiling.

"You got a hard knock on the head, boy," the medic beside him said.

Brian tried to sit up, "Adam...Adam," he screamed. The medic pushed him back down on the stretcher. His hands were no longer cuffed and Brian reached up towards the man. "Adam...?"

"He'll be ok, we put him in the other ambulance and he's already half way to the emergency room," the medic said. "We have to transport you too. Looks like you may have a concussion."

There was the sound of voices at the doorway and Brian's father pulled himself up into the ambulance.

"Brian...oh, Thank God. I'm his father."

"You can ride with him to the emergency room," the medic said and he moved over to give Mr. Mahoney some room to sit. Brian heard the doors slam shut and in moments the siren wailed as the ambulance moved up the street. The medic had a pressure cuff on his arm and he felt the thing swell as it was pumped up.

Brian looked up at his father's distraught face. "Sean...?"

"The police are talking to him. I don't know what happened," his father said.

"Sean saved my life," Brian said, "And so did Adam...he was shot."

"I got that much from the cops. Who was that man?"

"A bad cop...he tried to molest me," Brian said and then the tears came.

"Oh my God," Bill Mahoney said.

The medic flicked a light in Brian's eyes. "I think he has a mild concussion but we'll get him X-rayed just to be on the safe side."

Brian felt his father take his hand and squeeze. They remained that way for the seven minute ride to the emergency entrance. The ambulance backed into the portal and the doors were thrown open. Willing hands grabbed the stretcher and Brian was pulled from the ambulance, his father leaving him there. They took him in through the automatic doors and he squinted in the over head lights as they wheeled the stretcher into the emergency room.

A group of nurses and doctors were gathered in one corner and Brian tried to raise his head.

"Whoa, young man, the less you move the better," a nurse beside him said.

"My friend...he was shot," Brian said.

"He'll be fine," the woman assured him. "The bullet went clean through his side so they are just patching him up. We need to worry about you right now. Going to take a few pictures of your head and clean that blood off your face."

Brian didn't even know he had been bleeding, but that didn't bother him anymore.

"Say, aren't you that boy in Saint Benedict's choir?" the nurse asked.

Brian tried a smile but his face hurt. He was beginning to feel like he had just done three rounds with a heavyweight champ. "I have a headache," he said.

"I'll bet you do. Now lie still until we get you off this stretcher."

A group of men and women in white coats surrounded him and Brian was lifted off the stretcher and onto a hospital gurney. A doctor arrived with a clipboard and began to give orders. First a nurse cleaned his face with gauze pads and some strong smelling stuff that made his scrapes sting. Then two women in green clothes arrived and he was wheeled down the hall and into the X-ray room.

Brian lay still as the machine clicked and moaned, then he was done and back down the hallway once again. This time his parents were waiting, his mother cried as she saw his face.

"Oh, Brian...what happened?" she asked, taking his hand. "And what is this?" She held up his hand and Brian looked down that the marks on his wrist where Pullman had brutally cuffed him.

"Later, Alice. The boy needs to rest now," Bill Mahoney said.

His parents stood back as a doctor came in and pulled the curtain around the bed. He held an X-ray negative in his hand.

"Looks like you got just a mild concussion," he said. The man examined Brian's eyes with a small flashlight and felt the boy's neck. "We'll give you some mild pain relievers but you'll have a pretty sore head for a few days."

He turned to the Mahoney's. "We'd like to keep him overnight for observation. He seems pretty strong, but we can't take any chances at this point. I hear he's one of those boys from the Boxing League, is that right?"

"Yes," Bill Mahoney said.

"I recommend he stay out of the ring for a few weeks anyway, give him a chance to heal before he gets banged up again. I understand the other boy lives with you too?"

"Adam Farmer, yes, is he all right?" Mr. Mahoney asked.

"We've cleaned the wound and pumped him full of antibiotics, he should heal up nicely in a few months. The bullet didn't hit any major organs. It was fired at such a close range it went right through his abdominal muscles. He's in excellent shape too. There must be something to this boxing business.

"But we're going to keep him here for a few days. He's been given a mild sedative and he should sleep through the night. Why don't you come back in the morning, he should be awake by then. The police will want to question them both, but not until tomorrow. I can do that much, they need some rest."

Brian felt so tired and he dozed off after the doctor left. He awakened in the night and found himself alone. There was another bed across the room but it was empty. Through the doorway he could see the nurse's station across the hall. Faintly, he heard the sound of familiar voices from out in the hall and he smiled. The nurses of the night shift were playing the Christmas recording.

Sometime later, Brian awoke when a nurse came in to check his vital signs. When she left he looked over towards the window and saw the first light of dawn glowing through the blinds. That was when he noticed that the other bed was occupied. He turned his head to get a better look and felt a throbbing pain in his neck. Adam was asleep in the other bed.

Despite the pain, Brian pushed himself up to a sitting position. There was a monitor beeping quietly beside Adam and several tubes ran down from bags hanging off the wall. Slowly Brian eased back the sheet and turned himself towards the side of the bed. His head ached something fierce, but he had felt worse after a bout in the ring.

Pushing off the bed, Brian's feet touched the floor and he stood up. Moving slowly across the room, Brian reached the frame of the bed and eased himself down towards the mattress where he took a seat. Adam's hand was lying outside the covers and Brian took it in his own.

Immediately he felt the warmth in that hand and he started crying. Brian sobbed, the fear of everything that had happened overcoming him all at once. The hand he held came alive and reached up to touch his face.

"Don't cry," Adam whispered. "I'm ok...we're ok."

He scooted his body over slightly in the bed and Brian saw him wince at the movement. Adam lifted back the sheet and Brian lay down beside him. Adam kissed his forehead and stroked his hair until Brian stopped crying.

"Go back to sleep...I'm here," Adam said. And they both fell asleep.

The nurse who came in to do the morning vitals stared down at them for only a moment before she smiled. It was against all regulations, but what the hell. By now the entire hospital knew who these kids were and what had happened to them, it was all over the early morning news.

In a few hours they would be awake and the police, followed by a dozen reporters would want to hear their story. She turned away and shut the door quietly as she left.

"A police detective from the Southeastern district was killed in an altercation last evening in Curtis Bay," the reporter said that morning. "But before you jump to conclusions, you have to hear our amazing story."

Sean Williams was being touted as some kind of hero for thwarting the kidnapping of a boyhood friend, although the name of the victim wasn't being released due to his age. The name of the other boy, Adam Farmer, was released since he was over eighteen and a shooting victim.

The Chief of Detectives let out the whole story about Frank Pullman's sordid past, including the fact that he had been under surveillance for some time. How he had eluded his watchers wasn't divulged, but the attempted kidnapping of a young boy was discussed. The statement didn't exactly say that Pullman was a child molester but the news media picked up on that right away.

It didn't matter, Pullman was dead, and the boys were the focus of the city's concern once the reporters started putting all the names together. Brian might have been spared all the publicity if the Christmas album hadn't been so popular at the moment.

It only took twenty-four hours for the media to find the association between Adam's boxing experience and Brian's. Stories of how the boy had pummeled the cop before being shot were all across the news. Sean tried to dodge the reporters and his uncle closed the store to keep them away.

But then it was revealed that the dirty cop had a copy of the Christmas tape in his car. It seemed to the public as if he had learned about his victim from a photo on the cover. The frenzy increased, and so did the sales. Father Connor was beside himself when the doorbell at the rectory started ringing. First the reporters and then demands for more

tapes confined him to his bed for a week. The good Father seriously considered it was time to retire from his parish duties.

Brian came home from the hospital and then so did Adam, who was under doctor's orders to stay in bed for the rest of the week. Sean had to sneak in the back door after school on Monday to avoid the reporters camped out on the Mahoney's doorstep. Brian gave him a hug and then they sat next to Adam to hash the whole incident out.

Adam had dodged Father Connor several minutes after Brian left for the store. He'd grabbed his jacket and followed after Mrs. Mahoney told him where Brian had been sent. If there was one thing Adam remembered from the past, it was that Brian shouldn't go anywhere alone.

He'd spotted the blue car in the alley immediately and was just in time to see Pullman hit Brian with the gun. A rage swept through him and he attacked the cop regardless of the gun the man held in his hand. Pounding the man had given him the greatest satisfaction until the man pointed the gun his way. He'd turned away as the gun fired, and felt the burn as the bullet tore into his side.

Sean had been in the back storeroom when he heard screams and then the shot. Pulling up the metal bar to open the door, he'd seen the cop and the blue car, immediately knowing who the man was. Brian was screaming as Sean stepped through the door and raised the metal bar. One blow and the man had gone down.

Someone had called nine-one-one to report a shooting and the city had responded quickly. But once the uniformed officers identified Pullman as a plainclothes detective, Sean was cuffed and placed in the back of a squad car.

It wasn't until the first ambulance arrived that Adam regained consciousness and told the first uniform he saw that Pullman had tried to molest Brian. The uniform didn't believe him until Adam said to call the Chief of Detectives. He'd remembered John saying the boss over all the detectives knew about Pullman and had him under observation.

Sean was released, and with his uncle, driven down to the police station to make a statement. He'd admitted Brian had been a long time friend and that he had just happened on the scene and reacted to save his buddy. The Chief of Detectives himself arrived a short time later and so did Sean's folks. They were all glad to see the man in the dark suit shake their son's hand. Sean was a bona fide hero.

No one had mentioned Gabriel's connection to Pullman, and they never would. Pullman had gone after Brian for whatever crazy reasons swirled in his sick little mind. Only Brian knew that it had something to do with Gabe, Pullman had threatened to kill him "just like his buddy." And when he told his friends about that, they speculated over what had really happened to Gabriel. Had Pullman been involved in the boy's hanging? But there was no one left to answer that question.

Sean told them he couldn't walk down the street now without someone smiling at him. "I didn't mean to hit him that hard, but when I saw it was you lying there on the ground, I swung that bar hard as I could. I wanted to kill him...he needed killing. God forgive me," Sean said crossing himself.

"I know I have, you saved us both," Brian said.

"Yeah, I did, didn't I?" Sean laughed. "It's a good thing I like girls. They've been chasing me all over the place this weekend."

"Watch out, I'll bet Mary knows how to use a metal bar too," Adam laughed.

The school grounds were declared off limits to reporters and Hanson strictly enforced that rule. But with Adam still in bed, the Mahoney's allowed Brian to take the week off as well.

Several detectives came to the house and took their statement of the events. There were no charges filed against anyone, in fact the cops were outright apologetic over the incident. There was a coroner's inquest held over the death, but the boys were never asked to testify. It was as if Pullman had never existed.

By the time they returned to school, the news media had lost interest in the story and things almost went back to normal. Adam had to show his scars to everyone on the boxing team. The attention was nice but he did manage to mention that getting shot was no picnic. Then they were out for Christmas vacation.

Christmas seemed almost normal too, with Brian singing at the holiday mass and Adam sitting out amidst the congregation. New Years Day arrived and the whole family went on a road trip to Washington, the Nation's Capital, just to see the Christmas decorations on the Mall. Brian's brother and sister had come back into town to celebrate the holidays.

Maybe it had something to do with Christmas at home or maybe they needed to see each other again after the Thanksgiving disaster. But Brian found himself the center of attention while both of his siblings paid great deference to Adam for saving their little brother's life.

No matter that the media touted Sean as hero of the day, the Mahoney's knew the real truth. And Adam, being his usual quiet self, would never claim to be a hero. He didn't need public acclaim, he privately had Brian's.

And somewhere in that holiday, filled with good will towards men, Brian made his decision. He chose his moment carefully. And as they all walked down the snowy Mall that evening, surrounded with Christmas glory and the lights reflecting off the national monuments, Brian told them what was in his heart.

"Mom, Dad...John, Barb, I've been meaning to tell you something for the longest time. I'm gay...I'm gay and I love Adam."

Bill Mahoney stopped walking and his wife turned to look at him.

"Go on, Bill, tell him," she said.

Brian's father sighed. "We know, Brian."

Brian looked over at Adam. "They know?"

Adam sighed. "I told your mother I was gay six months ago, right after my birthday. I didn't feel right living under your roof without her knowing."

"Now don't get upset at him," Alice Mahoney said. "It was a shock at first, but he did it out of honest feelings for us, and you especially. I guess we've always known you might be gay, ever since you were a little boy."

"We love you, son. Nothing will ever change that," Bill Mahoney said. "And Adam is a fine boy. He's the best friend you've ever had."

"Way to go, little bro," John said and Barbara laughed, they all did, except Brian.

"I just thought, what with the church, and all..."

"Now, Brian. I still pray for you in that church, no matter what they think," Bill Mahoney said. "We're family, and God listens to me when I pray. He watches out over the Mahoney's, and I guess that includes the Farmers now too. Can we walk over to the Capitol now, or do we need to discuss this any further?"

With that the family resumed their tour, only now Brian put his arm around Adam's waist and they walked as one.