

Chapter Sixteen

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I met the Mahoney boys in their hotel suite at The Sands for this interview. They have been performing here all week to great acclaim, sometimes doing two shows a night. But it is now a sunny afternoon here in the Nevada desert and bright light streams in through the tall windows of the hotel suite. As I was admitted, the boys were sitting on a settee and they stood to greet me warmly. Brian Mahoney is dressed in a button down shirt and tie, his brown wavy hair, reminiscent of a sixties rock star, is swept behind his ears. Adam Mahoney stands several inches taller, at six foot-two. An imposing figure, strong and yet serene, his eyes seem to sparkle with amusement. He wears a Baltimore Orioles cap and sweatshirt over faded jeans, casual but neat.

Despite their young age, both show great poise and well practiced manners which I found charming. During the interview their parents sat quietly to one side, allowing the boys to make their own statements. This interview left me with the feeling that these young men are definitely in control of their own destiny.

Metzger: You're Brian and you're Adam Mahoney, did I get that right?
Adam: Yes, you did. I just recently became a Mahoney, legally that is, my former name was Farmer. My parents both passed away and I've been living with the Mahoney family for over two years now. It just seemed like the right thing to do.
Brian: Adam and I have been like brothers since we first met. Has it only been three years?
Adam: What, you're tired of me already?
(The boys laugh)
Metzger: Well, I see two very proud parents sitting across the room. I imagine they have been very supportive of this musical collaboration between you two.
Brian: Yes, they have, and it hasn't always been this easy. They both tried to keep our lives normal when all the chaos from this recording first started.
Metzger: Did you have any idea it would take you this far?
(Brian looks at Adam)
Adam: We thought it would be a local hit at first, but then it blossomed. The contract with Morning Star Records gave us national exposure and Brian's voice did the rest.
Brian: He always likes to give me the credit, but it's his music, his lyrics. I'm just the singer.
Metzger: You're both too modest. This album is playing coast to coast. But let me ask you about the early years. You're both from Baltimore?
Adam: Brian is, but I was born in New Jersey and only moved there after my mother died seven years ago.
Metzger: And you met Brian at a boxing club?
Adam: (smiles) Yeah, he taught me how to box.

Brian: He wasn't the same person when we first met but we all saw the great potential he had for the sport. It didn't take him long to become one of the strongest guys on the team.

Adam: Now that's modesty, Brian was the best boxer on the team. I was amazed at his skill and fortunately he taught me everything he knew.

Metzger: So you never fought against one another?

Brian: Oh no, we sure did. It was like fighting against me and he didn't pull any punches either. Maybe I taught him too much. (laughs)

Metzger: Then how did the singing begin?

Brian: I was in the church choir at Saint Benedict's parish where I live. Adam came along and started recording us. We made two albums of the choir music and things just took off from there.

Metzger: Believe it or not, I heard that Christmas album. I imagine it's still a best seller.

Adam: Yes it is, but it allowed us to make the contacts in the professional world that led us here.

Metzger: And that would be the 'Mothers and Sons' recording you just recently made. How did that come about?
(Adam looks at Brian)

Brian: I suppose he wants me to tell you. Ok, Adam wrote a lot of music when he lived in New Jersey. He was like eleven or twelve at the time and I thought that was amazing. We were looking for something to record and Adam pulled out these old songs of his and we started working on them.

Metzger: That is pretty amazing for such a young boy. But where did the inspiration first start...Adam?

Adam: My mother helped me write them, she was very talented performer. It was a sad time in my life, she was dying of cancer and yet she worked on the music with me.

Metzger: I'm sorry to hear about your loss. So she was the inspiration behind the recording?

Adam: Yes, we did it for her...and my new mom. Being a part of this family has helped me tremendously. A kid needs good parents.

Metzger: And they certainly can be proud of you both. So I have to ask, what's next?

Brian: Future plans include finishing the tour and then some time off to write more music. I'm still in high school, and that man who just walked in over there is my tutor. I guess it's time to go do my lessons now. It was nice meeting you.
(Brian leaves the room, but Adam smiles calmly)

Adam: I was lucky, I graduated last year. And since you're here, I'll let you be the first one in the media to know. I was accepted at Julliard for this fall term.

Metzger: Congratulations, I hear it's a top school for musicians. You know that your management gives us a press packet with all kinds of information about you, but I've also heard that things weren't always so rosy these past few years. Would you like to comment?

Adam: (thinks a moment and then smiles) Baltimore is like any other large city when it comes to people. There are the good and the bad, although our part in Curtis Bay seems to be full of the former. It's a neighborhood where the people know and respect one another. They look out for kids running in the street and they all go to church on Sunday. My new parents are the best part of that neighborhood and I feel safe and very much loved in their care.

So when bad things happen it's amazing how quickly our friends respond to help us. If Brian hadn't stepped forward and taken on the responsibility of being my friend I don't know what I would have become. The boxing club taught us strength and discipline, while Brian taught me patience and kindness.

Metzger: He seems to be the best kind of brother for you. I saw your performance last night and witnessed the chemistry between you first hand. I think your mother would be very proud.

Adam: Thank you. But let me show you something. The cancer took her in stages, one month she would be fine and then the next very ill. She wrote me letters during that period and I've saved every one of them.

(Adam reaches into his pocket and takes out an envelope)

She wrote this one when I was thirteen, it's probably my favorite.

(He unfolds the paper carefully)

Dear Adam, I don't know what that silly doctor was doing when he told you I was dying, but I suppose he was just trying to prepare you for the worst. I still have some time on this planet and will always be there for you, even if it's only in your heart.

When you were born I held you in my arms and knew you were special. And just as the first man was named Adam by the Creator, I so named you. You see there is something important about being special and different. It makes you stand out above others, and gives you a chance to change lives. Whenever you can, I hope that you will be a positive influence on people and bring them joy with your music...

(Adam pauses)

The rest gets pretty personal, but you can see that my mother wanted me to pursue a career in music. Teaming up with Brian was the right choice.

Metzger: So no further thoughts of boxing?

Adam: Oh no, Brian and I still workout three or four times a week. I guess it has become almost a spiritual experience. Those are times when everything else gets pushed aside, all the noise and attention subsides, and we are alone with the sweat and the pain. See, I used to watch him sing up there in the choir loft and was in awe of how close to God he was at those times. It was as if he were one with the peace and harmony that only the angels must feel. I envied the way he could achieve those moments of love and grace, and then he helped me find my own.

Metzger: Does this mean you've become a more religious person?

Adam: Not really, but I do attend church more frequently now that I'm a Mahoney. But it isn't the celebration of the mass that brings me to church

on Sunday, it's the feeling I get from the congregation. Brian and I agree that the people are the church and our strength comes from that sense of belonging there together. His voice, my music, it's all an expression of the divine influence in our lives.

Metzger: Is there anything else you would like to say to the readers of our magazine?

(Pause)

Adam: Yes. People must believe in themselves to achieve success in life, but I don't think that it's possible without the love and support of others. Alone we might see ourselves as weak and helpless, but that is the time to forge alliances, bring friends of similar interests together and learn to fight for what you believe.

I'm not saying that religion is always the answer. So many kids my age are put off by what they see as hypocrisy in established religion. But if you believe that life has a purpose beyond daily existence then I think a person also has to accept that there is a guiding hand somewhere out there in the universe. It may not be the God we are shown in church, but then we are simple creatures who will never really understand the divine. But I pray every night in thanks for the way my life is going and for the people who make it happen.

Metzger: That was lovely, you're quite the philosopher.

Adam: I am my mother's child...the both of them. It seems that one of them gave me the ability to grow wings while the other allows me to fly.

Metzger: Your music does express that so very well.

Adam: And you haven't heard that last of it...

The bell on the Stop-n-Shop's door tinkled and Sean looked up from the page in the music magazine he had been reading. His face immediately took on a glow, the wide smile on his face quickly turning to laughter.

"Brian...Killer B...hey there," he yelled, "How the hell are you?"

The two friends embraced and Brian realized he had really missed seeing Sean in the past four months. Returning to the Bay had seemed like a dream after the harsh realities of the road tour. Nothing about sleeping in elegant surroundings in all those dozens of cities could match his desire to lay his head on the pillow in his own room. The Bay was home, and Sean was always going to be his best friend.

"Oh, Sean, I missed you so much," Brian said. His arms wrapped around the boy in an affectionate hug. He held Sean off at arms length and searched his face. The broken nose still looked the same and there were even a few new scars. But the eyes were clear and blue, showing he was still the defiant little brat that Brian loved.

"When did you get back?" Sean asked.

"About three hours ago. You're the first person I wanted to see," Brian said.

"Then I suppose I should be honored. Hey, I was just reading about you guys."

"Oh, Sean. It's not like that between us...is it?"

"No B, I'm just messing with you. How was it out there in the real world?"

"In a few words? Exciting and terrible. Adam and I saw some pretty amazing stuff and yet nothing ever looked better than our own front door. He's sleeping off the jet lag, but I had to see how you're doing. Anything new...are you still with Hanson?"

Sean grinned, "I'm the new points champ of the season. Can't you tell, look at my face?"

"It looks the same to me, just as ugly as you always were," Brian laughed. "So now you're the top dog, I'm happy for you, that's great."

"I had to fight your boy, Jamaal, two months back. It was a tough one, probably the hardest fight I've had so far. He asked about you before I wiped that grin off his face," Sean said. "He's still got that gold tooth, but his face looks much worse now. How long are you gonna be home?"

"Wish I could say it was for good but there will still have to be some trips out of town. Otherwise, Adam and I will have most of the fall to work on new material while he starts school. We have a television spot to do in New York next month...I want you to come with us."

"New York...me?"

"Yes, Sean. I want to take my best friend with me. Let's just call it a birthday present, I owe you one."

"I suppose my folks will let me go...it sounds great," Sean said.

A woman approached the register with her groceries and Brian watched as Sean rang up her purchases. She looked at Brian and then he saw the moment in her eyes when she recognized him.

"Hello, Mrs. McDonald," Brian said.

"Brian Mahoney...oh dear, how are you?"

"I'm fine. My parents and I just got back this morning."

"Oh my...you're so famous now."

"Yes ma'am, but I just want to be Brian here at home."

She smiled and shook Brian's hand. "You deserve at least that," she said. "We're very proud of you, dear."

"Thank you Mrs. McDonald...you're very kind."

She left with her purchases and Sean laughed when the door finally closed. "I give it an hour before the whole neighborhood knows," he said. "But you have to expect it. You and Adam have been all the talk for months. No one from the Bay ever made it this big before. She's right, you are famous."

Brian frowned. "You have no idea how much I wish life were just back to where it was before."

"Ain't gonna happen, but I won't treat you any different."

"How's school?" Brian asked.

"You planning to come back to Key?" Sean asked.

"No, I can't. I've had a tutor the whole time I was gone. He's gonna get me the test before Christmas and I will graduate early. This whole fame thing won't allow me back, you see that don't you?"

"Yeah, it would make things difficult. Mary and I are still going out," Sean said.

"I was gonna ask, how is she?"

"Still sticking with me. She goes to confession and we take communion together every Sunday. But then I don't think either of us tells Father Connor the truth about what we've been up to, it might kill him. It might get more serious than that, B."

"You gonna marry her?"

"Thought about it...maybe in a few years. I want to go to college first, so does she. Turns out she's damn smart, wants to be a nurse."

"That's great...can I help out?" Brian asked.

Sean smiled and put his hand on Brian's arm. "I appreciate the offer, but it won't be necessary. My uncle doesn't have any kids so he told me I'm gonna get the store when he's gone." Sean crossed himself. "God forbid that's any time soon, but I can pay for school anyway. I imagine you guys have made some bucks from this music business."

"Yeah...too much, I don't even want to know how much. I let Adam take care of the business side of things. He and my father do it all."

"I think it's so cool that he joined your family. It must make things a little easier on you," Sean said.

"All this time and nobody has guessed a thing," Brian said. "We've been real lucky."

"Well they aren't gonna hear it from me," Sean replied.

Brian smiled. "I still love you, Sean. You're as much a brother to me as Adam."

"I love you too, B. It ain't easy being a hero, you know. Now tell me more about this trip to New York."

The neighborhood gave them about twenty-four hours of peace before the well wishers began appearing at the door. And by mid-week the Mahoney's realized that wasn't going to stop anytime soon. But it was Alice who offered her opinion of what these people really wanted.

"I think you boys should give a performance for them," she said.

"We'd have to ask Morning Star, legally they have a say even though it's our music," Adam said.

"And they would want to make a publicity statement, television cameras and reporters. No, I mean a small, quiet...personal show, just for the neighbors."

"I like that," Brian said. "We call it a rehearsal and Morning Star won't get involved at all."

"Well the church might hold six hundred. Can we get Father Connor to agree?"

Brian smiled. "If we include the choir he will. But we'll have to teach them the parts, can we do it?"

"I don't see why not," Adam said. "Say like Saturday night in two weeks then?"

"But that's the fourteenth, it's my birthday," Brian said.

"Exactly," Adam said, "Can you think of a better idea?"

And so the word spread that Brian and Adam would perform for their friends on Brian's birthday. Father Connor quickly agreed. Father Dominic and the choir were flattered to become a part of the celebration. And since everyone wanted to get a seat for the concert, it was probably the best secret the neighborhood had ever kept.

Adam worked with the choir and Dominic marveled at how quickly the quiet young boy had grown into such a self assured professional. Not surprisingly, the boys had all heard the songs and were familiar with the music which made Adam's job much easier.

Brian and Adam had called at Liz's house the second day of their return to congratulate her. The week before she had been elected president of the senior class, a role Brian knew she would fulfill very well. Her parents seemed a little star struck around the famous pair but Liz took it all in stride.

"Everything still ok?" she asked.

"Yeah, better than ever," Adam said.

She drew her fingers across her lips and they all laughed. Brian knew their secret would always be safe with her. She had continued her support of the CBBL and was actually dating one of the boxers.

And so when the birthday concert was planned the boys made a list of special guests to occupy the front row of the church. Liz and her family, Sean and his parents, including Mary and her mom. Claude Hanson, Mr. Wayne and John Martin were on it too.

Patrick had called when he heard they were back in town. His contribution to the album cover had done wonders for his career, especially since Morning Star had paid him for the art work. He was now showing his art down at Fells Point in one of the newly established galleries frequented by tourists. He promised to come as well.

Brian wasn't sure when he became suspicious that the concert was going to be more than a little singing with the choir. No one had seemed to be sneaking around behind his back but he knew Adam pretty well by then.

He went clothes shopping with his mother several days before the event but Adam begged off. The trip to the mall gave him an idea of just how big the album sales had boosted his popularity here at home.

In the window of the Record Barn was a blow up of their album cover and a photo of the boys. It didn't take long for the crowds to form and start following them around. Several groups of young girls cornered him in the men's department and started clamoring for an autograph. Brian signed a dozen pieces of paper before the manager allowed them to use the back door and escape into the parking lot.

They arrived home and Brian couldn't wait to tell Adam what had happened. But the boy was sitting at the piano playing a piece Brian had never heard before.

"What's that?" Brian asked.

"Uh, just working on some thoughts," Adam replied, but he closed the lid over the keyboard and stood up.

There were phone calls that his father took in the bedroom away from the family and Brian grew more curious. Even his mother began to get preoccupied with things she had to do over at the church. Yeah, something was up.

Adam had rented a Steinway grand piano for the event and it was delivered to the church and tuned on Saturday morning. They had the whole day to relax but Brian found himself alone in the house at one point. His mother had baked a birthday cake the night before which sat in the refrigerator. But by then Brian knew it was a ruse to make things seem normal.

They dressed together at home, with Adam donning the white suit he liked to wear for their performances. With a blue shirt and red tie to top off the outfit, Brian often kidded him that he looked like a flag instead of a fag. But tonight there was no joking and Adam seemed unusually nervous.

"I just never figured we'd be doing this in front of all our friends," Adam said, "My hands are shaking."

Brian straightened the boy's tie and they looked at themselves in the mirror over the dresser. "We look good," he said. "Like a million bucks."

"Two point three million, four hundred and thirty thousand to be exact," Adam said.

Brian gasped. It was the first time Adam had ever mentioned their new found wealth.

"You're kidding...is it that much?"

"Almost to the penny, pretty amazing isn't it."

"My God, Adam, what are we going to do with all that money?" Brian asked.

Adam shrugged. "We'll probably just make more. I'm sorry. I know you don't want to worry about the money. But it isn't a worry at all, it's a blessing." Adam smiled and kissed Brian. "I have something for you, birthday boy."

From his pocket he brought out a small box and held it in his hand. "Since today you are legally of age I can declare my love openly." With that he opened the box and Brian saw two identical gold rings in the dark blue interior.

"Oh Adam...you didn't."

Adam took one of the rings and put it on Brian's right ring finger. "How about we wear them on our right hands for now. I would ask you to marry me but I don't know how we could accomplish that."

Brian looked up with tears in his eyes. "I don't know either...but it doesn't matter, this is enough." He took the second ring from the box and slid it on Adam's finger.

"They're beautiful," he said. "This is the best birthday I've ever had. And you're the best thing that has ever happened to me."

"Then let's go celebrate," Adam said. "See, my hands aren't shaking anymore."

The church was packed with more people waiting on the steps to get in. They went around to the side door beside the rectory and Father Connor let them into the vestry.

"My, don't you both look grand tonight," he said as he shut the door.

"Thank you again for allowing us to use the church, Father," Brian said.

"Think nothing of it, my boy. You two have done so much for the parish that it was about time we did something for you."

Adam peeked through the vestry door. Out across the altar he could see the piano set up beside the communion railing. There were people still standing in the aisle but they had about fifteen minutes before the scheduled beginning of the performance.

Bill Mahoney saw Adam at the door and gave him the thumbs up sign. He would come back to the vestry and tell them when the choir and audience were ready. Until then the boys would have to sit and wait. Father Connor picked up his coat and went out the side door to walk around to the front of the church. But just as he left Father Dominic stepped through the vestry door from the altar.

"Hello boys, all ready?"

"Yes, Father," Brian said.

"The choir ready?" Adam asked.

"All dressed and waiting anxiously. You remember what that was like, don't you?"

"We still get nervous before a performance, Father," Brian laughed. "It wasn't that long ago I was one of them."

"Yes, and those were good times," Dominic said. "We'll be waiting for you to make your entrance."

"Father, before you go, will you give us a blessing?" Brian asked.

The priest smiled. "Of course, anything for you two." The three of them knelt on the hard linoleum floor.

"Heavenly Father, bless these young men and their endeavor this evening. All of us here at Saint Benedict's have seen the joy and love they bring to this world through their music. Bless this union of mind and spirit that allows them to show their faith in thee through song. For it is their faith in God, and in one another that brings them to their knees before you, Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ Our Savior, I bless thee now and for always.

"You boys have brought light where there was darkness in so many hearts and minds. I have watched your dedication to one another and know that this church is truly lucky to have you here tonight, and I hope you will always remember us in your prayers wherever life may lead you. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen."

Father Dominic made the sign of the cross and both boys crossed themselves as well, repeating the "Amen" after the priest. For Brian it was a moment of empathy with the man and for all he had endured over the years. Adam had still remained outside the church but he was feeling more Catholic than not as the Mahoney family shared their lives with him.

They stood back up and the priest shook their hands. "I meant every word," he said. "There hasn't been such joy in this parish since it first opened, although I hasten to say that I wasn't around at the time. No jokes, Mr. Mahoney, I've been aware of you for some time. Sister Mary tells me everything."

Adam snickered. "He's got your number."

"Yes, I have your number and I hope you have mine. If either of you ever needs anything, please call me."

"You've done so much already, Father," Brian said. "Thank you."

The priest hesitated and then gave each of them a hug. Brian felt as if the man had left something unsaid, something he had been meaning to say for a long time. But he only smiled and left to take his seat in the church and the boys were finally alone.

"Bless this union of spirit," he said," Brian repeating the priest's words. "It almost sounds like we were just married."

"I'm married to you in my heart," Adam said, "Always have been."

"I almost think he knows about us, Adam. For a while I thought he might come out to me."

"You think he is gay?" Adam asked.

"He could be, but that must really tear him apart inside while he wears that collar around his neck. A gay priest, now wouldn't that be something. I once thought he was in love with Gabriel, but..."

The door opened and Bill Mahoney stuck his head in. "You boys ready?"

"Ready as we'll ever be," Brian said.

"Give it two minutes and then take your places," Bill said.

"Thanks, Dad," both boys replied in unison. Bill smiled and shut the door.

"You made his day calling him that," Brian said.

"Well he is now, isn't he?"

"You got a watch?"

"No...you?"

"No, I took it off."

"Oh well, so then we have to count." When they reached a hundred Brian impatiently opened the door.

There was a sincere round of applause as the boys entered the church. They both genuflected and crossed themselves before the altar as they had planned. It was done by every Catholic in the world when passing before the altar and the Holy Sacrament it held. It was a reminder to all that this was still their church.

Adam stood beside him as Brian approached the microphone. The applause died down and Brian smiled.

"Good Evening, and welcome to all our friends and neighbors who have joined us here tonight. I am Brian and this is Adam, we're the Mahoney brothers."

There was a cheer and the audience began to applaud again, only this time it got louder and the people rose to their feet in appreciation. Brian was awe struck at the sound from these people. He saw his parents smiling and laughing in the front row. He had the chance to see Claude and John, Patrick and Sam, and even Mr. Wayne was standing there applauding.

Adam put his arm on Brian's shoulder and leaned into the microphone. He was laughing as Brian stood there dumbfounded.

"Welcome to Brian's birthday party," Adam yelled above the applause.

That brought more cheers and Brian looked up as the choir made its way down the aisle to take their place on the altar steps. Adam leaned over and yelled in Brian's ear. "Gotcha."

Now he got it. Adam had meant this as a real surprise party for his birthday and not just a concert. He gave Adam a hug and then motioned the audience to take their seats. It took a moment but the church was finally quieted down.

Brian laughed and took up the microphone while Adam seated himself at the piano.

"Ok...you got me on this one," he began, looking at Adam. "Thank you all for coming out tonight." Brian paused a moment. "This past year we've been a lot of places and seen so many things. But when people asked us where we were from, both of us proudly said Baltimore."

The audience went crazy over that and again it took several minutes before Brian got them to settle down.

"Please, you're gonna make it hard on me if you keep going on like that. And no doubt Father would like us to get out of here sometime before mass in the morning." There were some chuckles at that comment but this time the audience settled down.

"We've told people about you, and by you I mean the good people of Curtis Bay here tonight. And every time we spoke of this neighborhood it only made me realize how much I missed you all." He held up his hand to ward off any applause. "But I couldn't tell them that this place is inside of me, I had to show them. So for all the kindness you have given me in my life I have given out that love to the audiences in a hundred cities across America. And for that reason they know you and respect you as much as I do."

Brian couldn't stop them this time and again the audience rose to their feet in thunderous applause. Brian went over and sat down beside Adam.

"I better stop talking or we're gonna be here all night," he yelled. Adam agreed and gestured to Father Dominic to ready the choir. Brian went and stood beside the boys, a place he felt most comfortable. And the audience settled down when they realized that the music was about to begin.

Adam began playing the chords of the second song on the album, the one for which the name Mother and Sons had been written. The choir opened the piece and Brian quietly sang along with them, keeping to the tenor part with the boys until his part began.

The smiles were uniform across the many faces in the crowd. This was their church, their choir, their boys and now their music. Brian sang with feeling about a mother's love for her boy. He saw his mother's glowing face and the pride his father felt as he sang that song. Looking up to the loft he saw people swaying to the sound and realized how much this music touched them.

As the song ended there was silence in the crowd as Adam segued into the next piece. And Brian felt the presence again as he always did when this song was played. It was Adam's song to the angels. Brian sang most of the opening solo with his eyes closed, feeling the church as if it were alive around him. The sound of his voice resounded off the walls and he smiled inside. Yes, this was a place where he could sing comfortably about the heavenly beings that had haunted him for so long.

And as the boys in the choir joined into the song, Brian opened his eyes and looked up towards the loft. It was as if he expected to see Gabriel standing up there, nothing like that would have surprised him at this point. But only the distant faces of the neighborhood looked down on him and Brian sang only for them.

They had planned only eight pieces for the concert, but Brian had added one more. Since he had left them, the choir had been without a soloist for the past six months. Dominic had been searching for a voice, but he had not found that special one just yet.

So to please him, Brian took his old place in the center of the choir. He stood a head taller than the boys around him but they welcomed him back. And with Dominic waving his arms they began the 'Dona Nobis' from the mass.

It seemed like an age since Brian had sung this song but in reality it had been less than a year. Time had seemed to stretch out as his life became more complicated and yet here he was again. Adam played the chords and they began the song everyone in the room knew so well.

And maybe it was a fluke but Brian found himself listening to the young boy beside him as they sang. The kid was hitting all the right notes and as Brian looked over at him the boy seemed to take courage in his own voice and it rose to match Brian's.

Damn, Brian thought, the kid is good...real good. How had Dominic missed out on this? He remembered the boy from last year when he first began. Michael...Michael Sullivan. The boy was another blonde wonder. He would have to talk with Father when this night was over.

Brian put his hand on the boy's shoulder as he took the solo and he could feel the energy in the lad's body. And as the piece reached a musical break he leaned over and told the boy to sing the solo with him. The kid paled at the challenge but he smiled as well. And so as they began the last verse, Brian and Michael took up the solo together, much to the amazement of the crowd before them.

It was this performance that brought down the house. There would be no stopping it this time. The crowd had watched young Michael sing with Brian and everyone realized

what had just happened. Brian threw his arms around the boy and gave him a hug to the cheers that echoed off the walls. The choir would have a soloist; Brian had passed the torch to his replacement.

But if he thought they were done for the evening, Brian was wrong. And as the applause died down, Adam stood up and took a stand behind the microphone.

"Thank you all," he began and the crowd settled down. Brian still stood amidst the choir wondering what was coming next. "Thank you," Adam repeated.

"I'm the new guy in town," he said, "and many of you haven't known me that long. But having traveled these past many months with the Mahoney family and becoming a part of their lives, I have come to know many of you.

"I have written another piece that I would like to share with you tonight. It's a song without words, for I have yet to ask Brian to help me write them. It's a song for him, as my brother and as the one person left in my life that has always given me unconditional love.

"You cannot understand the place I have come from or the feelings that I lacked before I met him, there are no words to express that time in my life. But this is a song of joy, of hope, and it won't be the last time you hear this particular piece of music."

With that, Adam returned to the keyboard and began to play. It was the music Brian had heard him playing only days before. The piece moved forward at an amazing pace, as if Adam had been driven to bring several themes into the piece. And as he played Brian felt the heart of the song burst forth into his consciousness. This was a moving piece, a great piece. And again Adam repeated the subtle melody beneath the surface as if he was unwilling to let it escape just yet.

It was dramatic and worthy of a huge orchestra, and yet Adam gave it such power through the keyboard alone. And as the music pounded on Brian realized that Adam had put all of his hopes and fears of life into this one piece. Then as the audience sat, so stunned they couldn't understand what was happening before them, the melody burst forth with all the joy and happiness anyone could wish.

And Brian felt the tears brimming over as he realized that this was Adam's life all in one moment in time. The child who had lost his mother and found himself dangling in the wind. The small boy crying out for love and finding none. The young man who had given his heart to another and found peace at last, it was all there in his music. It always had been.

The piece ended with the melody repeating over and over, as if Adam was amazed at how good his life had become. Brian felt the applause more than he heard it, a thunder that seemed to shake the very church itself. All he saw was Adam staring up at him from behind the piano and he couldn't resist the urge. They came together in a hug before the whole church and the applause continued.

It wasn't until the applause died down that someone in the back started singing Happy Birthday, but it was inevitable. The whole crowd joined in the song and Brian smiled and felt their love. These people meant the world to him.

There was cake and punch in the social hall below the church. Amazingly enough the old mirror ball still turned slowly overhead as if someone had forgotten to shut it off. And what a cake it was. The whole thing filled the length of two folding tables and Alice with her ladies in the baking club, along with Liz's able help, had spent two hours on

assembling the darn thing before the concert. Brian was sure to thank them for the effort as it quickly disappeared.

But as Brian and Adam stood by the door, giving thanks to the many people who had come that evening, Brian felt a hand touch his arm. He looked around and saw young Michael from the choir standing there nervously.

The boy was about twelve years old and he was clearly intimidated by these famous people before him. Brian smiled and shook the boy's hand.

"Michael, you did wonderfully this evening, what a voice," Brian said.

Michael smiled, his cheeks flush with embarrassment. "How did you know?" he asked. "How did you know I wanted to sing?"

Brian leaned over and whispered in the boy's ear. "A little angel told me. And I've already told Father Dominic that you want to be the new soloist, so you better go find him."

The boy grinned with excitement and quickly ran off to find the priest.

"A little angel?" Adam asked.

"I put my hand on his shoulder and it felt like he was about to explode with the music inside of him. I understand that feeling; it was inside of me at his age. He'll do just fine."

Adam shook his head and laughed. "Now you've gone and put another angel in the choir, haven't you? I should have known. Please, let's just go home."

Brian smiled. "Yes, I understand that feeling too."

Post Script: The author would like to thank the fine people of South Baltimore for inspiring this story. This has been a work of fiction woven from the lives of many real people I met over the years, and for that reason there is truth behind each and every character.

There is no Saint Benedict's parish and there is no Mahoney family living in Curtis Bay, at least none represented here. But the children of those hard working people live in neighborhoods much as I described in the story and their lives are just as complicated and wonderful. They hope and dream, endure triumph and tragedy just like my characters, until sometimes the line between truth and fiction becomes blurred and I cannot but wonder, as you may have, that they must be real, but they are not.

The life of a gay adult is one thing, but only recently has there been a place where gay youth can seek acceptance and guidance from peers and concerned professionals. But there is still intolerance and violence in the city towards gay youth. Much of society, both gay and straight, still faces the problem with ignorance and fear. But the walls are coming down.

I attended a Baltimore Pride festival some years ago and there amidst the crowd was a booth for the fledgling gay youth group. These kids were articulate and driven to involve the gay community as a whole in supporting their cause. They are everywhere amongst us, although they may not always take such an open stand. For them, for the kids out there on the street who feel they must hide a very large part of what they are, I offer this story.

They spend years learning to understand their difference and strive to accept the pressures of their generation. It is my wish that each and every one of them find sincere love and understanding in their lives. They can make a difference in this world and they must be given the chance; they are the future.

Chris James, 2007