

No Irish Need Apply



A Novel

By Edward C. Patterson

Copyright, 2008, all rights reserved

Dedicated to the many PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapters across the United States, who take the time to understand and save through that understanding many young and not-so-young lives. They are paving the future with love.

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

No Irish Need Apply

Edward C. Patterson

Dancaster Creative Writing

www.dancaster.com

edwpat@att.net

First Kindle Original Edition, January 2008

Copyright 2008 by Edward C. Patterson

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in any form, in whole or in part (beyond that copying permitted by U.S. Copyright Law, Section 107, "fair use" in teaching or research. Section 108, certain library copying, or in published media by reviewers in limited excerpt), without written permission from the publisher.

Other Works by Edward C. Patterson

Cutting the Cheese (Kindle Edition) B0010K2ER6

Bobby's Trace

Surviving an American Gulag

Turning Idolator

Look Away Silence

Nan Ya

The Jade Owl Legacy

The Jade Owl

The Third Peregrination

The Dragon's Pool

For further information contact edwpat@att.net

1

Communality

On the surface, the Bordens and the Lonnegans had little in common except they were families limited to two souls each — a son and his mother, both widowed and both Irish — not *off the boat* Irish, but second and third generation. Perhaps Louise Lonnegan was more Irish than Sarah Borden, because she had married a Waterfordman, while Sarah landed an acquaintance of an acquaintance, Harold Borden, who was a mongrel breed of Brit, Dutch and Lenni Lanape — a typical New Jersey mixture. What the Waterfordman and Harold Borden held in tandem were grave plots just a mile from each other and their widows and orphans, and although these men may have never met when they coursed this earth, their souls might have sidled up to heaven's table for a *close to the chest* game of poker and a mug of sulfurous suds. It's difficult to say what ties we manage when the box is lowered and the dirt *she do roll over*.

If Harold Borden observed Sarah's progress since he upended and drove earthward, he may have been pleased. She kept her own company and watched over the progress of son Kevin with smothering diligence. Sarah had not drowned in a sea of sorrow, although she stuck close to home and rarely allowed herself the luxury of a social evening since Harold's funeral. This gave her more time to dote on Kevin and plan her pup's every move, which managed to repel said pup into that zone that is termed *rebellion* and *non-compliance*.

Had the Waterfordman (whose name was Laren) took a heavenly peek down at Louise Lonnegan and son Louis, he might have been shocked. His widow stayed a widow, wore the weeds and wept herself to sleep each night. His son — well, he would have disowned him if there was any inheritance (which there wasn't) and if he were given just one more hour to walk Earth's weary path, he would have drowned his only son for the wussy display that certainly was not inherited from the mother country.

The widow Lonnegan rarely saw her son. Life in Linden was not easy after Laren's demise. The Waterfordman turned in a fair days work as a mechanic at Bob & Allen's Garage and Repair, while Louise did her share with the evening shift at Min & Mum's Family Diner. Together they managed to hold fast to a small apartment over Mrs. Larimer's house on Apple Street. It was a nice house on a dusty street, but still in clear view of the refinery that belched that stew that had given New Jersey its trademark. Still, Louis Lonnegan left each morning to catch the School Bus to Union Municipal High School applying care not to wake his mother's recovery from her all night stint. He knew that when he returned, the apartment would be quiet, Louise leaving him a cold plate in the fridge — usually something tasty, as she was a good cook with whatever she could muster. Things were particularly hard lately. Min (of Min & Mum's) threatened to cut back on help and Louise worried. Trade was off — tips were down and "No Irish Need Apply," she would say to Louis, which, in her mind, meant there was a particular bias against the *Children of Erin* in this predominantly Polish-Latino neighborhood. "There was a time, Louis," she explained one day, when he found her crying at the kitchen table (which wasn't unusual since Laren's death), "there was a time, when everyone hated us — the Irish. They had signs in the winders that read *No Irish Need Apply*. It's a hateful thing to know that you're not wanted jist 'cause you're from a special stretch o' land that folk think is somehow cursed by God." She told him that if anyone was *let go* from the halls of *Min & Mum's*, the colleen would be the first and "jobs were scarce as the coins in our slush jug."

Louis thought to seek employment. That's what Laren Lonnegan would have expected, but

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

Louise wanted her son to stay in school and rise above the bob and weave of menial employment; above the heckles of *No Irish Need Apply*. So, as Louis headed for school on that mid-May morning, with the gray belching stacks of Linden at his back, he held to the cold metal bar of the bus seat in front and glanced out the window into traffic. No one sat beside him. No one would. There was always a solitary seat reserved for him. Also reserved were the snickers of a different type from the jocks in the back of the bus. Louis had learned to ignore them, or so he wished. *Fuck you all*, he thought as his gaze over the traffic. Ignoring the whispers was much like ignoring the smell of the refineries, if you lived in that smell. You learned. It was sharp and acrid, but it was what you had to do if you wanted to survive the day. So, Louis Lonnegan would ride daily (as he did this day) listening to the whispers and snickers, which he knew were for him. He often wished that there was a placard on the bus that read *No Irish Need Apply*. This would have given him an excuse to walk instead of being enveloped by the unfriendly society of the School Bus — or High School in general.

One thought kept him sane, and yet nervous (more nervous than he cared to acknowledge). That thought was named *Kevin* — Kevin Borden, his new after-school study partner. Louis would tread from class to class in silence all day with no one giving him a kind word or look (not even the teachers), and then, there would be Kevin. Kevin spoke. It was all study and business, of course, but it was the *English language* — clear and unwhispered. Kevin always had a clear study agenda — an outline of the subject matter; pages to be covered. He would plunge in without ceremony or chitchat. But yesterday was different. While they reviewed *The Era of Good Feeling* for the approaching U.S. History final, Kevin stopped mid-sentence. He caught Louis' dark eyes. Suddenly, there was more than an *Era* of good feelings. Louis knew the feeling. He had them in the past and that would have caused him a good drowning, if his father hadn't fallen into the pit at Bob & Allen's — a pit as deep as the grave it dug. Yes, Louis has those feelings before, on two occasions. He did not suppress them, which is probably why the school bus murmured with hateful glee, and why even the teachers approached Master Lonnegan with more than a hint of suspicion.

What Kevin Borden read in those moments, Louis couldn't tell. He only hoped. It was their senior year, after all and soon he'd be free of High School. He'd seek the world beyond. The *world beyond* seemed limited for an Apple Street resident. He was sure that Kevin Borden lived in a better part of the county, where the houses were surrounded by picket fences and hollyhocks. Louis could smell the aroma of hollyhocks. It was a funny aroma to replace the refinery fart smells. He was sure that despite the distance of the High School from the refineries, his clothing reeked of the gas pipes — *eau de Joisey Turnpike*. He was positive that Kevin Borden could sniff it and guess what a slag he had drawn as a study partner. Kevin exuded Hollyhocks — Louis was sure of it. And Kevin's eyes were dark and beckoning, although Louis wasn't sure whether that pause in the library was a beckon to anything. He *did* know that it was unorchestrated, unlike the rest of the study sessions. So as the bus hauled into the driveway of that gray granite castle of lower education, Louis Lonnegan did not give his mother's employment crisis a second thought; nor did he think about his hip-hopping, iPoded classmates, who sneered at him as they left the bus; nor the first period teacher, Mr. Swan, whose every word trumpeted like his name. Nor did he think about his dear, unsainted father lying a mile from Harold Borden in one of Linden's less sacred plots. No. Louis Lonnegan thought only of study hall at the end of the day, the chance to confirm his suspicions about his new friend, Kevin, son of Sarah, the widow Borden of Kenilworth Gardens.

The Kitchen God

Beyond the tall, fire-belching stacks of Linden; beyond the plain, unvaried flats of Secaucus, spread the gentle, fertile Garden State. Here the word *suburb* was born in the green swaths of land between miles of shopping Meccas. Here little metropolii mushroomed with row upon row of houses and homes — some brick and some stucco — some high rise and some quite shallow. From these emerged (daily) a swarm of urban workers chugging their way to the great city sprawl only to creep back to their chinks at eventide, happy to be there, despite being called *provincial*. It was the ebb and flow of the *people sea* — a people patterned to take from mammon and redistribute it to the mites. Yet despite the lure of the urban magnet, there were some that resisted the urge; some that remained forever warren in their suburban hutches far after the tide receded and the fires burned out.

Sarah Borden gazed out at the cloudy suburban Jersey sky. The steady rain had finally stopped, allowing Sarah to emerge onto her back porch to sweep the puddles away. After all, there were geraniums to fuss over and here and there a pansy. The air was redolent of Hollyhocks as this was the *better part of town*, with pockets of cupcake homes, each alike in gable and path; differing only in the choice of shrubbery and the color of the window sashes; and even those bore some hereditary resemblance to each other.

Sarah looked to the sky, a behemoth rain cloud having drifted like some dragon away toward the more deserving refineries of Linden. She smiled to the heavens as the late afternoon sun made its buttery appearance, casting a glow over the geranium clumps that heralded the weeds. *Everything's just right, now*, she thought. *Right as rain.*

The phone rang, a loud burble set so clarion the neighbors could hear it. Sarah's reverie broke. "Coming," she said in a singsong. The neighbors most likely heard that too. They probably thought: *hurry and get that frackin' thing before we throw a rock through the kitchen window and knock the receiver from its hook*. Neighbors are always so accommodating — even in thought.

Sarah clattered through the double screen door, and then trotted through the living room into her cheery kitchen. It was cheery, now that the sun was peeking through the clouds sending bright filigree fingers over strawberry patterned draperies.

"Coming! Hold your horses. I'm coming." She was winded by the time she reached the phone — a pink wall accessory, soon to be obsoleted by cordless varieties. Still, Sarah was content to stretch the receiver from one end of the kitchen to the other when she rattled (which she did often), especially since she had an extra long cord that even allowed her to pace halfway through the living room. She grabbed the phone on the tenth ring.

"Hello," she sang out. It was a resounding bellow, which must have blown out the ear of the person on the other end. "Oh hi, Junie. Glad it's you. Had to run for it. Out of breath." She sat on a convenient stool that was tucked under the phone. The kitchen counter was also convenient enough to support Sarah's tidy heft. She wasn't what one would call fat, but her girlish form had flown south with the geese many summers ago. Her tawny hair was streaked silver; a late middle-aged gray. She caught her breath. "Oh that's better, Junie. I was outside sweeping the rain." She winced. "What? Of course you need to sweep the rain. Otherwise it gathers in the cracks and wrecks the precision of the walkway. I know I'm fussy like that, but Harold is careful to preserve the house." She sighed, and then gazed toward the strawberry drapes. "Well

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

he was . . . when he was here to care for things. Someone's got to do it now. Kevin's so busy lately. You should know from your Bruce."

Sarah listened to a stream of Junie's yapping. It was probably nonsense, but it happened at least twice a day. Junie (June Dee) was a great conversationalist, the kind that carried each word with care and delivered it like pollen to every stamen that happened to pipe toward her ear. Sometimes she actually got the correct gist of the tales she told. She always added her own annotation and perhaps a plot twist. People can't blame a veteran gossip for adding a plot twist. After all, in every tale, be it doctrine or calumny, there are always gaps. Veteran conversationalists are experts at filling in the gaps like seamless spackle in the holes of truth — veneering for the final product. June Dee excelled in the art. Sarah was less expert. She was more a listener, and fed more yarn to the knitter.

Sarah punctuated June's rattle with head bobs and the occasional *I didn't know that. Isn't that just the case*, and more concretely: "Oh really. I didn't realize she was going in this week. I thought it was . . . Bad thing that. My Harold used to get them and couldn't sit down in one place for very long. Tried everything."

Pause here while June listed all the remedies for hemorrhoids in her *collegium pharmaceutica*.

"Yes, the cream. He tried the cream, but the . . . well dear me . . . the suppositories worked best." Sarah laughed. She fussed with the sugar bowl, blushing now that the conversation had turned to *ass-holes*, especially her deceased husband's. Suddenly, she flared: "June, did you know I went to Flender's Mart on Wednesday and there was no *Preparation H* on the shelf." She winced. "No, I was just curious. I used to buy it so often for Harold that . . . well . . . let me finish." She picked up an errant dust cloth that lay on the counter. She flicked it about the edges of the cabinets. "Well I made inquiries, and guesswhat? Flender's had them removed from the shelves to the customer service counter." She gazed about, as if someone had stepped in from outside to eavesdrop on this ripe bit. She whispered. "It seems that drug addicts use *Preparation H* to clot their needle pricks. Imagine that." She hiccuped and blushed, flicking the dust cloth furiously.

Suddenly, Sarah sprang to her feet like a crocus on the first day of spring. "Oh, I know what's new. I can't believe I forgot to tell you. My Kevin has a new study partner." She listened for a reaction like a true gossip maven, and like a true gossip maven, she was keen on the response. Such an occupation could make a person rapacious — even a bit dangerous, however Sarah's heart was genuine; opened to life's better nature. "I don't know his name, Junie. No. If I had met him, I would know his name, wouldn't I? Where's your logic?"

Sarah revealed the details that she *did* know — that Kevin really didn't need a study partner (after all, Bruce — Junie's son, didn't need one either), but the year-end exams were upon them and graduation was at stake. This study partner was evidently a smart egghead. They were studying in the library and would most likely study here (well, when they needed the computer) and then all would be known, it would. She had asked Kevin about his new friend, but Kevin was perfunctory.

Kevin was always perfunctory. Getting information out of Kevin was like drilling for oil in the Bronx; or maybe getting *Preparation H* in aisle 5 at Flender's. Suddenly Sarah raised her eyebrows.

"What does the *Prom* have to do with my Kevin's study partner?" She winced again. Junie was a great one for changing subjects, especially when the subject wasn't *Junie Dee*. "I know the

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

Prom's coming up. I don't know who Kevin is taking."

Wince.

"I know it's coming up and I know it's important. I imagine he'll take . . . Alison. You know her. Alison Mott or Mart. No, Mott, like the applesauce!" There was a grand wince, and then a heavy polish with the cloth. "I know it's *Mott's*, Junie, but the reference was good enough for government work."

It was then the kitchen door opened and a damp flash streaked by Sarah — streaked by, and then threw his books on the kitchen table.

"Kevin Borden, get back here . . . No Junie, he's home."

"Gotta pee Ma."

Kevin disappeared into the living room leaving Sarah in a full eye-roll. "Listen, Junie, I'll call you later. The little god is home and has the run of the place. I'll get more information on the study partner. Yes . . . yes, his name, although I don't know why that's so important. Yes, yes. Ta."

She hung up. She stared at the rain splattered book pile that had leveled her neat arrangement of salt, pepper, and sugar bowl. (They were Chicks and Chanticleers that Harold had bought at Atlantic City the year before he died). *It would have been tragic if they had smashed.* She righted the salt shaker, and then tossed some grains over her left shoulder.

"Kevin!"

No answer. She knew he heard her. The john wasn't that far away, unless he used the one upstairs, but she hadn't heard his elephant tramp up to the second floor. Kevin was lanky and tall, but when he set his feet to it at two steps at a time, the whole house shook. No. He was in the downstairs john; and he could hear her.

Sarah's eyes rested on the loose assortment of books — Calculus, Spanish, the History of the American People — quite an array, all frayed and dog-eared. *At least they looked more used than when he got them.* Sarah had offered to cover them. In her day, all books were covered with brown paper and neatly labeled for content. She had some book covers in the stationery cabinet. She was more than willing to do the deed, but Kevin resisted. *The guys would call him a sissy. Only sissies covered their books.* Heaven forbid. Sarah sighed, her hand straightening the stack. *Calculus.* That's a subject she never had to study. No computers in her day. *No wonder these poor kids were struggling to get good grades.* It was a good thing Kevin had a study partner, because Sarah would never be able to help him with *Calculus. Not in a bear's life.*

She opened the cover, and then cocked her head. On the first page was an array of graffiti — not in Kevin's hand. He had beautiful penmanship and this was chicken scratch and said . . . said what? *Calculus sucks my dick.* She chuckled and was glad to see someone had lightly scratched this out. She saw a whole history of ownership in the graffiti on the front cover and first pages. *Interesting.* It was like those paintings she saw once in the Metropolitan Museum — those paintings from China, where every owner popped their own mark on the face of things. She wondered if any of these said *Lu Yu-san sucks my dick*; somehow she doubted it, but the thought was amusing. It was strange that her thoughts turned amusing. The Widow Borden entertains herself with wild thoughts of Chinese graffiti and *Preparation H*. She sighed. There was something else on the front page.

Louis Lonnegan — 214 Apple Street — Linden, NJ

"Kevin."

This time he answered. It sounded like a distant croak through a funnel (his voice had

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

finished changing, but still cracked on occasion). She heard a flush, and then listened for a running sink. If she hadn't heard that, there was a special lecture reserved for dirty pigs, but she heard water running. *Smile.*

Kevin appeared at the threshold, all six feet of him. He was just five feet last week, or so Sarah thought and sprouted out of his jeans and shirts like lightening on a cornfield. He was tall and could be called handsome if he hadn't frowned so much, his jaw always pensive; even stony. Sarah thought him a veritable god as he stood in her kitchen, his hair rain-matted, waiting for her lecture on throwing books on the table.

"Where's my kiss?" she asked.

He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "What did that cow Junie Boonie want? I saw Bruce today and he's getting as fat as his mother."

"How did you know that was Junie?"

"Who else would it be?"

"You're too smart," she said. "And books don't belong on the kitchen table. You almost broke my Chickies."

He glanced at them. "Sorry." He wouldn't have done that. He knew that his father's spirit dwelled in every knick-knack in the house. "I didn't mean to. I really had to go."

Sarah opened the *Calculus* cover. "Is this the name of your new study partner?"

Kevin glanced at it. "Does it matter?"

"Well, I guess not, unless he's a state secret." She glared at him. The address was in that beautiful penmanship she knew well. "Lou," she said, and then smiled.

"He doesn't like to be called Lou."

"Well, pardon me."

Kevin scrunched his shoulders and headed for the fridge. "Do we have orange juice?"

"We always have orange juice. You'll have to pee again." He flipped open the carton, taking a swig. "Use a glass."

"That's all I needed."

"Well, clean up your mess," she said. "Junie wanted to know who you were bringing to the Prom."

"Shit, Ma . . ."

"Don't use that language. Your father would not even use that language. It's disrespectful and a sign you have no colloquial skills." That's what her mother always said, and even though Sarah had a limited grasp on what *colloquial skills* encompassed, it was a good old Irish tag from the repertoire of a good old Irish mother.

"Sorry."

"Well, who are you askin' to the Prom? Time's a flittin'."

Kevin ran his hands through his matted hair. Sarah thought he needed a haircut. Even wet, it was over his ears. Of course, before the Prom he'd have a nice style; maybe a crew cut. He always looked good in a crew cut.

"How about Alison?"

"Maybe. There's stall time."

"Well, if you don't ask her soon, you'll be sitting with me on Prom night in the living room watching reruns of *The Golden Girls*."

Kevin closed his eyes. What lay beneath those lids was a guess, but it certainly wasn't an evening watching syndicated TV with his mother. He kissed her forehead. "I've been so deep

No Irish Need Apply – Edward C. Patterson

into the books, I haven't given it much thought. But I will."

Sarah smiled as Kevin closed the book cover.

"Louis Lonnegan," she said. "A nice Irish name. And you could invite him over you know."

"I am," he said. "We need the computer."

She thought they might. *Calculus, you know.* "I'll make a nice dinner. Just give me warning."

Kevin smiled, gathered his books, and then headed for his room. Sarah beamed. He would ask Alison Mott or Mart or whatever her name is, and he'll invite Lou . . . Louis to dinner. She gazed down at the chickens. *He's growing up, Harold. He's gonna make us proud.*

The Complete *No Irish Need Apply* can be ordered in .pdf format at
http://www.dancaster.com/eyes_main.htm

or

In Kindle format at
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0012NOW44>