



*Sample Chapter*

# *Look Away Silence*

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# Chapter One

## Folding

### 1

I am a child of Christmas. Some people are Easter-kids. Others get fired up over the Fourth of July or wax poetic for Arbor Day. Not me. Christmas has always been the focus of my year, because everything that has been good in my life has come down from the sparkling Yule Fairy and wrapped up in bows and striped paper. As little children, we wish for many things at Christmas — trains, bikes, Legos, baseball gloves and some, like me, asked Santa for an ironing board. Now that would bode well and never shock, except my name is Martin and not Martina, and . . . it quite put my Grandpa off his Monday Night Football. My mother was cool with it, otherwise she would have bought me a GI Joe and insisted I dig trenches and drop fake bombs over the chenille. However, I wouldn't have minded a GI Joe either, a fact my mother also sensed. So it was an ironing board for me. Vivian Powers' sissy boy was devoted to Christmas from that day forward. I knew there was a Santa Claus and his linen closet was impeccably arranged.

Across the folds of time and through the tumble-downs of Christmases over the years, I found all my requests fulfilled. When I was old enough to find true love (or so I thought it true love . . . I mean, every time it was true love), it was at Christmas. That was the year I had drunk too much eggnog and awoke in a stranger's bed — a stranger who unwrapped me like a party favor and gave me the most wonderful Christmas gift of all. In hindsight, the ironing board was better.

Despite the exciting sensation of joining with another soul, I learned fast that such passion was like the sea at ebb tide. I know about the sea. I live by the sea, here in Long Branch where the tide comes in and then sucks out a bit of the Jersey shore, a bit like my first passionate experience. Metaphors are not my forte. I should stick to laundry. I saw then true love for what it was — as false as Ru Paul's D-cup. It didn't last past New Years Day. And yes, my heart was broken. I cried and cried like a bride left at the altar. However, I was a lucky boy — still am. I have a mother like no other. She sat me down, dried my tears and said, "Marty," (I hate being called Marty, but mothers can't be corrected — at least not mine). "Marty, he was a stranger. Didn't know ya and didn't want to know ya."

Still, I loved *what's his name* (funny how I forgot his name . . . Frank. Frank . . . that's it. I remember his face, his hands and his hot breath in the night, but I still need to squeeze the corners of my mind for his name). My heart was shattered. No amount of Vivian Powers' insightful advice could bring me around. However, my mother is a straightjacket case at times. Nothing controls her. The few words of advice that she has given throughout my life have stayed with me. So I remember exactly what she said, because it echoes every time I fall in and out of love, whenever Christmas turns into Easter.

"Marty, he was a stranger. Didn't know ya and didn't want to know ya. Just like ya father. None of them are worth the spit they splatter. But always get at least one thing from each of them, and you'll have enough carfare for the Path line to the city, where you can find a better one. In your father's case, I got you, Shithead." (She's so endearing that way, but I'd rather be called *Shithead* than *Marty*).

Of course, Viv (I never called her Mom or Mama or Mother dearest — her choice) was never a proper homemaker. She knew to buy me an ironing board, but only so I could do her ironing. My dad, the mysterious Mr. Powers, gave me my name, which I thought to change from Powers to Jones, because Jones fitted me better. He hadn't stayed around to top the tree with the fairy angel, but I

never cared. In fact, Viv told me she wasn't sure who my father was as there were three candidates for the month. All the men in my life were defective, except one. They were all either druggies, old men, flaming queens, drunks, or just lumps on my pillow, except that one; and he . . . well, perhaps he was the most defective of all, because I've never really found my way out of Christmas with him, even though Good Friday has come and gone.

Perhaps I'm the defective one. Perhaps Viv was wrong and I'm the one not worth the splatter. I can't help it. I have standards. Men have taken a gander at me (not bad looking . . . me, that is. Not an ounce of fat, and that without a gym bunny schedule), and picture me in some interlude — some Act One in their own play. Unfortunately, Act One is always followed by . . . well, you get the drift. Sometimes they hear me sing (and I'm a veritable Lorelei — first tenor and soloist with the Jersey Gay Sparrow Chorus). Whatever it is, they end by worshipping at my shrine — the well-pressed sheets from my sacred iron capped by perfectly fluffed pillows. Morning always brings a different light. At night, they are Tom Cruise. At dawn, they transform into the bell ringers of Notre Dame. The grand consolation is that every year brings another Christmas and another handy appliance — *Vive la Viv*, my manicurist mother, who brought home lovelier men than I have ever nabbed — and those without an iron board to entice them.

Despite my gifted voice and inclination for housework, I couldn't live my life under my mother's wing. She scarcely noticed me, her little *shithead*, who, as I got older, got under foot. I had to close my eyes more than once to her tumbling over the threshold with one or, dare I say, two male companions, who had *likkered* her up and thought they had her at a disadvantage. Little did they know. They may have had their frolic, *but always get at least one thing from each of them, and you'll have enough carfare for the Path line to the city, where you can find a better one*. I supposed some day that I would have a little brother or sister and learn to change diapers, scrub bassinets, and all the other happy chores that motherhood brings. But no. Viv just managed a collection of diamonds, pearls and emeralds. They were gaudy things, not to my tastes or I'd have pinched a few. However, as time went on, and I graduated from Red Bank High School, there were more than a few hints from the maternal maw that I should get to college, or a job and, by all means, into my own hermitage, such as it is. The suggestions were subtle in the mornings over coffee and English Muffins. "How's the job hunt coming, dear?" In the evenings — those hazy evenings *a la Viv*, the point was sharper. "You're still here, Shithead?" In any case, college was out. Couldn't afford it and no one that I ever knew got a degree in laundry. I could have pursued my vocal training, but that would preclude that I had vocal training to begin with, which I hadn't. I was the youngest member of the Jersey Gay Sparrows, and while the Chicken Hawks often were on my tail, they were also jealous queens seeking to push me aside and away from the prime solos. So I did what any respectful young man that had more than a foot out of the closet would do. I went into retail.

## 2

Christmas and retail are friends, as close as Marley and Scrooge. In the sprawl of Eatontown Mall stood paradise — a Christmas chaos called Abraham & Straus. I bought me a suit and got me an interview to swim in the rarified air of departmental retail duties. I saw myself as the perfect go-to person in the linen department. I could live my life in thread count and percale — heaven on earth. There's nothing like the aroma of fresh linen — clean and mountainy, with a promise to bless the chest, to caress the shoulders and snuggle the toes with its gentle static-free cling — an adoration well beyond that of the Magi. However, to my disappointment, the management of the store saw me more as a *behind-the-counter* type in the men's department amidst a sea of ties and pants and shirts and sweaters. So instead of my Elysian Fields of Canon and Burlington Mills, I was lost to the Forest of Arden — Men's wear.

Retail didn't pay much, but within six months, my mother awoke to an empty kitchen and asked her question no more. I found an apartment — not very classy, but it had possibilities. It was a first floor back dealie with a rear entrance and a small courtyard. I couldn't see the ocean from my window, but I could smell the clams when they ripened — not the most encouraging aroma, but it was my stink and it stunk just fine for me. It was private for when I had my little heartbreak evenings, when the stink was worse than rotting clams, but that too was my stink. I was also within walking distance of the nearest gay bar — *The Cavern*, which would be a blessing if I didn't visit it so often, donating my meager income to the latest assortment of fruity refreshments of the adult kind. I was an adult now (barely), so what better way to exhibit that fact than to imbibe a bit, and more than a bit. After all, it was just a stagger across the street, through the alley, along the beach and into my courtyard palace.

So I thrived, after a fashion. Then came Arthur — Arturo, a stunning man, who wandered home with me one night and never left. Well, Christmas be damned, he did leave, but not fast enough. He stayed for six months, two of which were quite nice actually. He didn't work, so I left my daily bed unmade; and he would be off spending my money at the Cavern by the time I arrived home. It was fine with me. I joined him, and then we'd laugh and play volleyball and run about naked on the beach (after dark, when neighbor eyes were dimmed to see us). However, Christmas came to a close after a sixty-day period, like an expired Library book that I forgot to return. Arturo had another little addiction other than Appletinis and beer. Meth. He was not a Methodist, would that he was, and I am not judgmental when it comes to another man's predilections. However, when the cost is visited upon my bank account and the benefits of the bed fade, I usually become as mad as Queen Mab. My scant income could not compete with his habit. Therefore, he augmented his income with a better-heeled married man who made him his little lunchtime tidbit. Dinners went to a leather daddy who lived in Asbury Park and would pick Arturo up on the corner and redeposit him back there like clockwork. My evenings were spent listening to snores. So we argued.

Arturo turned out to be a mean son-of-a-bitch. He trashed my place one evening, and when I threw him out into the courtyard, he howled like a cat — my neighbors stirring to call the police, who showed up at my door wondering why a young swishy thing like me would even consider letting a bum like Arturo be my roommate. (We did the roommate thing on the police report). The next day, I took off from work and called my sister, Russ — a fellow ironing board surfer, who was also a Gay Sparrow and worked in retail. Together, we packed Arturo up and showed him the door. He was more docile in the mornings — pleading even, but Russ was born with a steel corset. He deposited Arturo on the sand without as much as a z-snap. I was glad to know this tough little baritone from the Tuxedo store — fiery charm in the declarative and a fine connoisseur of dust ruffles and dainty hand towels. I decided to live alone from that day forward. After all, I'm my mother's son and had to do her proud. But then, Christmas came along and . . .

## Chapter Two

### *Ties*

#### 1

It was Christmas again and through the hallowed doors of Abraham & Straus, lady shoppers prodded and poked through the racks while bored husbands watched the unruly children or passers-by in skirts. I always found it difficult when children ran amuck beneath the forest of ready-to-wear. However, give me an army of the brats rather than the heaps of sweaters the lady shoppers managed to unseat from the counters. Folding. Refolding. No matter how many times I sorted the cashmere into size and color order, the rainbow would unfurl in the wake of the shopping herd.

I had become a master at sweater resettlement on the holiday display. I was also an expert at attacking the shirt table, the browsers unsorting the sizes. Fortunately, the plastic wrap and pins kept the folds intact, except when a particularly nasty specimen of shopper would open the wrap, unpin the shoulders and let the garment drape. *There ought to be a law.* It was enough to shake me out of my holiday mood, and that was a difficult feat. When I smelled the holly, I was filled with the gift of the ages — the thoughts of a new vacuum broom and an assortment of attachments — that is, if Viv read my hints correctly. It was on a day of such mixed feelings, in the wake of a shirt destroying Wildebeest, who frankly was larger than one, when I felt the prickle. Call it *good will to men* or *Wildebeests*, but I always knew when the world was sorting me by size and color. A holiday hunch. I twitched, disregarding the mess. I strutted to my counter — a great glass and wood playpen festooned with tie racks and wallets and key chains. We even had a wide range of gloves — from rabbit fur lined to Crocodile Dundee — anything to warm your digits or tickle your fancy. However, I retreated to the counter, because I felt the *prickle*. I fiddled with my paperwork, not that it needed fiddling, but because I didn't want to appear too interested in anything except my work. I was being watched. The eyes darted from behind the jacket rack. They shifted occasionally to the pants and coats, but always back through the jackets and out to the counter. Watched — or rather, cruised.

It was not an unusual circumstance. I mean, with my lovely form, many a *hoohoo* was caught in my fairy ring. The secret was not to acknowledge it too suddenly or too auspiciously. There are rules to this courtship of eyes — rules that a gay boy learns in the schoolyard and on the fields of Venus. The shopper pretended to be checking out jackets, but he was really checking me out, fishing for a reason to come forward and state his case — a wink perhaps, or a subtle stroke near the crotch. I was flattered. He wasn't bad looking, although a bit gruffer than my usual type. He had a five-o'clock shadow and it was scarcely three. He wore a strange thing for New Jersey — a straw cowboy hat — a bit too small for his head, but with all the rhinestone cowboys on the Jersey shore, why not a buckaroo shopper grazing in the jacket rack.

I kept to my paperwork, but peeked to see his progress. I had nothing planned tonight. Well, nothing special. I meant to head to the Cavern with Russ and lift the eggnog in song with a rag-tag collection of Jersey Gay Swallows. However, art never belayed a rugged cowboy in the jacket thickets. I couldn't stretch the paper game for too much longer. The stacks would be a mess soon, and if you get too far behind, the place would look like Filenes' basement instead of A&S' finest. I remember that the prickle suddenly ceased. I darted about and the eyes were gone. *Shoot!* I then remember spotting the ugliest tie I had ever seen in my cravat forest — a neon purple thing with a subtle charcoal fleck through the fabric. *Yuck.* That will never sell. I stole another glance toward the jackets, but my cruiser was gone.

"I hate Christmas," came a voice, which didn't startled me, because I knew it well.

It was Russ. I just ignored him and stroked the ugly purple tie.

“Did you hear me?”

“I heard you. You hate Christmas, although any sissy worth his salt wouldn’t brag about it. Watch out or I’ll cut up your gay membership card.”

Russ leaned on the glass top.

“I just polished that,” I complained. I really hadn’t, but the nerve of the man. He should know better. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“I’m on break, hon,” Russ announced. “And did I mention? I hate Christmas.”

I had had this conversation about Christmas with Russ for every Christmas since ninth grade. Still, I had to say it. “Best time of the year for retail. Fresh merchandise. Lot’s of hungry shoppers. Plenty of fabric in hand, and sales, sales, sales.”

“Not to mention, no rest for the weary,” Russ said.

“Well, rest ye Merry Mary men, dearie, but not on my glass counter.”

Russ pouted. “This girl’s feet are in the Pearl Bailey zone.”

“Bitch, bitch, bitch. I wish I had a boss like yours in that fucking shoebox you work in. If I walked away from my counter as many times as you walked out of *Tux and Ties*, I’d be shit-canned.”

Russ stifled a yawn. I ignored it. He was always trying to get my goat.

“Formal wear,” he said, with his usual condescending campy air. “Formal wear just doesn’t sell like this crap from Santa’s elves.” He brushed his hand through the ties — my ties — even that ugly purple tie that you couldn’t give away at a tollbooth on the Garden State Parkway. “Besides, when you work in retail, never work big and schlock. Work exclusive. Work for perks.”

Suddenly, he grasped my arm and I felt the prickle again. I knew that prickle didn’t come from Russ. We were too much *the sisters* to generate any steam. His head lowered and his voice dropped.

“Honey, honey, honey,” he mumbled. “Look at that perk in the jacket racks. Maybe I should start working in schlock retail.”

My cruiser was back — eyes, hat and five o’clock shadow.

“Don’t be so obvious, Russ. He’s been checking me out for the last half-hour. But you know how it goes. They come in, look at this pretty ass, wink and wait, and then they open their mouths. And there it ends.”

“Give it a chance, hon.”

“They’re all strangers. Don’t know me and don’t want to know me.”

I gave a start. It was as if Viv stood beside me, her stringy raven hair kissing her shoulders — her Estee Lauder aroma dripping over the glass. I was my mother’s son. *Shithead*. Russ conveyed a stern look of gay wisdom. He had been around the block more than I had — danced more, screwed more, and was beat up more. In many ways, just like Viv, only with more verve than the manicurist’s hippie heritage. Less flower power. More Scarlet O’Hara.

“I know these over-the-counter encounters,” Russ said. He fanned himself with his hand. “Who knows? Perhaps a little Christmas cheer would do us all some good. You know, a little pick-me-up.” He glanced toward the racks. “He doesn’t look so little to me, hon. There might be a stallion under that cowboy lid.”

“Don’t encourage me,” I said. And I was encouraged. After all, it was Christmas, the time of the year I would pick up the matching gift to go with the vacuum broom. “That’s what I love about you, Russ. You’re so practical. You’re encouraging me to pick up a man while I’m on the clock. Do you want me to lose my job?”

“Not much of a job, you know. Still, it pays the electric bill in that little shanty you maintain, I suppose; especially now that Mr. Meth is gone.”

That pissed me off. I ran my hands forcefully through the ties, spinning them in their carousel. I wished Russ would toddle back to that *fru fru* mall shop that employed him — employed him to take

a break every hour. Russ bowed, not in forgiveness, but because it annoyed me.

“Sorry,” he said. “Perhaps, that one over there’s a millionaire on the prowl. A Texas oil man.”

“A millionaire who shops at A&S. Give me a fucking break. And, speaking about breaks, isn’t yours up?”

Russ careened on the counter despite my admonishing against his fingerprints on my well-polished counter top.

“Listen to your Auntie Russ. Never pass up an opportunity to take what is rightfully somebody else’s.”

“Listen to your Sister Martin. That’s the fastest ticket to hell. I know.”

“Hell, girl. According to the Pope, you and I are going to hell — table for two reserved on the aisles. Best seats in the house, waiting for the devil’s striptease.”

“Shoo. Back to work.”

A lady shopper appeared at the sweater stacks and looked like she needed help.

“Shouldn’t you be helping her?” Russ said, winking. “Some retailer you are.”

I turned my attention to the shopper, while Russ scooted over to the jacket rack, probably to get a better look at the mystery man. Russ was such a bitch at times. I guess if I wasn’t interested in my stalker, Russ wanted a gander. He took table scraps if offered — hell, even if not offered. I don’t know why we became such friends. Maybe it was the Viv in him I loved. He had the same daring *fuck the world, I don’t want to get off* attitude. It was like having a portable mother and one that probably cared for me more. After all, I was Mrs. Powers’ little accident, not that she neglected her maternal duties. However, I was always that complication in her life that didn’t fit well into the rest of the puzzlement that life really is.

“Can I help you?” I asked the shopper, but really had my eyes averted to the jacket rack.

The shopper smiled dimly, her yellow teeth flashing a wanton smile.

“Can I show you something?” I insisted.

She ignored me. She was wasting my time. Why did they always think their time was more valuable than mine? By the time she moved away, the cruiser was gone, probably fleeing at Russ’ approach. Russ returned, like snagglepuss.

“He wasn’t that good looking,” he announced. “Good ass, medium hands and about a nine and a half shoe.”

“You scared him off. Where did he go?”

“Well, you know your chances of . . .”

Suddenly, he was back. He emerged from behind the leather jackets and approached the counter. I slipped back behind the glass, pushing Russ away.

“Okay, girlfriend, your break’s up. Disappear.”

Russ didn’t budge.

“Leave,” I whispered. I introduced a sinister malevolence into my voice, a demonic grunting that Russ could not interpret any other way than *get out of here now or I’ll kill you with a clean heart*. Russell snarled like a cat, but flitted away. *And he’s at least a size eleven shoe*, I remembered thinking.

## 2

The man stopped just short of the counter. He wasn’t as rugged as I first thought. He had a lovely face and a slight mustache, which blended into his shadowy beard intentionally to increase my prickles. He was also shorter than I expected. Distance is a hard judge of these particulars, and I was just peeking after all. Staring gets you nowhere. I busied myself with the ties. Still, the man made no move toward his business. I knew I would need to help this along. He didn’t look like a shy guy, but

what does a *shy guy* look like? Nothing ventured, so I stopped my tie fiddling and assumed my best retail pose.

“Did you want me to match something up?” I asked, punctuated with a pixie smile. That always worked to get them off a dime.

Then he fixed me with his eyes — frosty blue. I trembled. It wiped my pixie smile away. I had never seen such a gracious look in all my days on this here Jersey shore. Sea blue eyes — Caribbean seas reflecting pink sands.

“I was thinking,” he said. He had a distinct drawl — something past Louisiana, perhaps down El Paso way. “I was thinking of a tie to go with . . .”

“To go with . . .” I asked, heading him off at the pass, *Amigo*. “To go with a particular shirt? I can match one up for you, if you pick out the shirt.”

He came closer, shifting from one foot to the other. I remember wanting to steady him with my hand. *Stop bobbing, man. You’re making me seasick.*

“Well, actually, it’s a gift,” he drawled.

A gift. Father or lover? I thought.

“Great,” I snapped, suddenly less pixie and more employee of the month. “Then, you don’t need to match it to anything but a personality. Is he a relative?”

“No. Not really.”

“Well, does he like silk? Designer names?” I frittered through the tie racks, my hands sweeping dangerously close to that ugly, purple tie. I stopped at the French stuff. “These paisleys are all the rage.”

“Do you like them?” he asked.

I winced. Why should that matter? You’ve spent all this time cruising me from the jacket rack, only to ask me if I like the paisleys. Better to talk about the weather.

“No. Not really. Too busy. They clash with stripes. I think they’ll be out of fashion as fast as they came in.”

The man swallowed, casting his eyes toward the tie spindle.

“Well, if you were picking something out for . . . for a special friend, what would you pick out?”

*Special friend?* I was crestfallen. Another waste of my time. My eye swept across the tie display now resting, as vengeance dictated, on the one tie that was beyond human nature to wear — the ugly, neon purple tie. *Hideous*. I plucked it off the rack with considerable *élan*.

“This one,” I said, trying not to laugh.

“Are you sure?” he asked. He snatched at it as if it was a raw piece of liver. “The color is a bit . . . well, very hard to match with anything. I don’t know.” He peeked at the price tag. “Wow,” he said. “Well, I’ll be guided by your judgment. It’s a special gift. I’ll take it.”

“Great,” I said. I regretted it. It was a rough joke to play on such a cute man. He was a bit rough around the edges — square jawed and stocky shouldered. “Do you need a box?”

“Yep.”

“Gift wrap? We offer free gift-wrap. Just go up the escalator to the right.”

“No . . . ah . . . um . . . no gift wrap.”

I folded the tie over my hand. *Hideous*, but expensive. It almost bit me. I thought to pull it back and tell him my tastes were as peculiar as a pimple on the Pope, but, what the hell, I was too embarrassed to *fess up*.

“You can’t go wrong with *Givenchy*, sir,” I said instead. “Good choice.” *The customer is always right*, even if the customer was shopping for some unsuspecting friend who will open the box and probably puke.

“A bit eye opening,” he said.

"Breaks the ice at parties."

"Yep. Breaks the ice."

"Credit card?"

"Yep, A&S."

"Good. That'll be \$36.99."

I rang up the sale while the man still fidgeted. Then, he tapped on the glass. I noticed fingerprints on the glass top, damn that Russ.

"I was . . ."

"Yes?"

"I was also wondering . . ."

"Did you need shirts or socks . . . socks for those . . . big . . . well, underwear maybe?"

"No, thanks."

"Then, Merry Christmas," I said, handing him the bag.

"Thank you. You too."

The man turned quickly, but then hesitated again. He turned back.

"Did you forget something?" I asked, hoping. *Second thoughts on the color.* "Did I forget to return your credit card?"

"Well, no," he said. He gazed to the ceiling. He really appeared shaken. Finally, he cropped his elbows on the counter and met my eyes squarely — Caribbean blue meets Carrara black marble.

"You know, I've never did anything like this before," he stammered. "If I'm out of line or offend you, please . . ."

I leaned in now. This one needed the full bull pull. I whispered in his ear.

"I'll save you the time. I'm family also and . . . I've been watching you too."

"Oh, thank God," he declared. He closed his eyes as if he were in church set to shout his *hallelujahs*. "That's such a relief, I can't tell you."

"We're everywhere, you know. But you wanted to ask me something."

"Yes. I was wondering if you'd like to go somewhere and have a cup of coffee or something?"

Ah, the coffee ceremonial, I thought. At last.

"And what kind of something did you have in mind?" I remember laughing. He sighed, his eyes darting toward the floor. This was a tender flower — a gentle cornflower eyed gentleman. I had to be careful not to crush him with my raging sunflower flare. I reached across the counter. "I thought you'd never ask."

He brightened.

"Then, that's a yes?"

"That's a yes," I said. "I'm off in an hour. There's a coffee shop by the *Tux and Tie* rental shop. *Old World Coffee*. Do you know where?"

"On the first floor. Yep."

Suddenly, I spied the woman, who probably decided she wanted one of those damn expensive sweaters. Now that the deed was done, I had to get back to work, although the prickling was incessant now.

"I'll see you there, then. By the way, I'm Martin."

"Matthew." He offered me his hand. *A gentleman, are we?* I gave it a shake. "My friend's call me Matt." *How original.* "In an hour. I'll be there."

Matt walked off forgetting the package. Suddenly, remembering it, he returned and snatched it off the counter.

"In an hour. I'll be there."

*What a rube,* I thought as I watched Matthew disappear into the mall. I twitched. The prickle

was gone. Strange how that feeling came and went with this guy. *Strange?* There was something in the air — other than Christmas carols and retail and shoppers and ugly, neon purple ties. I felt a spark of eventuality — those instances in life when fate transcends the folding of sweaters and games in the jacket rack. I am a child of Christmas, ever since I opened that long ago long-box with the ironing board and thanked flaky Viv for the best gift in the whole wide world. However, with the departure of the *prickle*, time seemed to fold on me — something kindling, echoing over the counter, trailing like fishing line to some indiscernible point at sea. I still wasn't certain whether this over-the-counter encounter was a gift from Santa. The ironing board still might have been better, but the sea ebbs and flows, and I was drifting. If I was a child of Christmas, then why did it feel like the Fourth of July?

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***The complete work can be purchased on Amazon***

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*Other Works by Edward C. Patterson*  
*Amazon Author's page — <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B002BMI6X8>*

*No Irish Need Apply*  
*Cutting the Cheese*  
*Bobby's Trace*  
*Surviving an American Gulag*  
*Turning Idolater*  
*Look Away Silence*  
*The Road to Grafenwöhr*

*Are You Still Submitting Your Work to a Traditional Publisher?*  
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*Oh Dainty Triolet*  
*The Twinning of Vincent Cassidy*  
*Mother Asphodel*  
*Little Vin at Dreamland*  
*Master Wu's Bride*  
*Willa Goodheart*  
*The Six Bells of Madame Lin*  
*Crickets in the Sun*

*Nick Firestone Mysteries*  
*The Sapphire Astonishment*  
*Old Friend Cane*  
*Green Folly*

*Farn Trilogy*  
*Belmundus – The Farn Trilogy – Book I*  
*Boots of Montjoy – The Farn Trilogy – Book II*  
*The Adumbration of Zin – The Farn Trilogy – Book III*

*Southern Swallow Series*  
*The Academician - Southern Swallow Book I*  
*The Nan Tu - Southern Swallow Book II*  
*Swan Cloud – Southern Swallow Book III*  
*The House of Green Waters - Southern Swallow Book IV*  
*Vagrants Hollow - Southern Swallow Book V*

*The Jade Owl Legacy Series*  
*The Jade Owl*  
*The Third Peregrination*  
*The Dragon's Pool*  
*The People's Treasure*  
*In the Shadow of Her Hem*

*Poetry*  
*The Closet Clandestine: a queer steps out*  
*Come, Wewoka & Diary of Medicine Flower*

*Pacific Crimson — Forget Me Not*  
*The Awakening*  
*Catherine and Other Poems*  
*The Festival of Thebes*  
*Ties and Rings*  
*Gay October*  
*Provincetown Poems*  
*Songs: Not Just Survival*  
*Plum Journey Visions*



Author Edward C. Patterson has been writing novels, short fiction, poetry and drama his entire life, always seeking the emotional core of any story he tells. He has currently 30 published books. He is known for spinning magical and fantasy yarns grounded in history and favors epic tales revealed in books series. His flagship works are The Jade Owl Legacy Series, The Southern Swallow Series, The Farn Trilogy and the Nick Firestone Mysteries.

In many of Patterson's novels, he combines an imaginative touch with his life long devotion to China and its history, having earned an MA in Chinese History from Brooklyn College with further postgraduate work at Columbia University. This background is the cornerstone for The Jade Owl Legacy, The Southern Swallow Series and Master Wu's Bride, works drawing on Sung and Ming Dynasty History and Culture. History has played a major part in the coming of age tale Little Vin at Dreamland.

Patterson's military experience is reflected in such works as Surviving an American Gulag, The Road to Grafenwoehr and Pacific Crimson - Forget Me Not. His gay life-way and work in diversity is reflected in his novellas No Irish Need Apply, Cutting the Cheese, Bobby's Trace and Mother Asphodel; and in larger works - Turning Idolater and Look Away Silence.

A native of Brooklyn, NY, Patterson has spent over five decades as a soldier in the corporate world gaining insight into the human condition. He won the Year 2000 New Jersey Minority Achiever Award for his work in corporate diversity and is a proud U S Army Veteran of the Vietnam Era. Blending world travel experiences with a passion for story telling, Patterson's adventures continue as he works to permeate his reader's souls from an indelible wellspring.

His novel No Irish Need Apply was named Book of the Month for June 2009 by Booz Allen Hamilton's Diversity Reading Organization. His Novel The Jade Owl was a finalist for The 2009 Rainbow Awards.

Edward C. Patterson is the proud founder of Operation eBook Drop which, in its heyday, distributed over a million eBooks to deployed Armed Forces members from over 2,000 independent authors. He has guest blogged extensively and has appeared on the Bobby Ozuna - Soul of Humanity Show. He is also proud of his Cherokee heritage, knows seven languages (including Cherokee) and is a contributing member of the ACLU.

“The little voice from between the lines can become a lion's roar, one listener at a time.”

Contact author at [edwpat@att.net](mailto:edwpat@att.net) — Feedback is always appreciated  
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