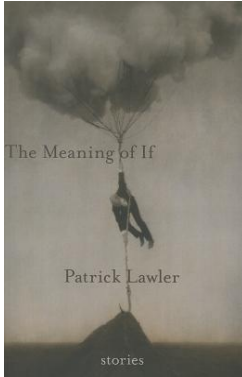


THE MEANING OF IF
Collection of Short Stories
(Four Way Books, 2014)



SAMPLE FROM *THE MEANING OF IF*

AT ONE OF MY FATHER'S FUNERALS, I WAS HUMPHREY BOGART

At one of my father's funerals, I was Humphrey Bogart. I stood in a trench coat pulling the smoke out of a cigarette. At one of my father's funerals he was very talkative—almost inappropriately so. “It is amazing,” he said. “You just wouldn't believe it.”

At one of my father's funerals my mother danced. Awkward at first, nearly toppling, then eventually as graceful as fog. At first her foot seemed to test the solidness of the floor, and then the tentative attempts. Finally, to the dismay of my aunts, she twirled dreamily, like an Arthur Murray dance instructor in a trance.

At one of my father's funerals, we all fell asleep. An elderly lady gently snored to the rhythm of barely audible church hymns.

At one of my father's funerals, the servants brought in delicious bowls of fruit, and we wept like gods.

At one of my father's funerals, all we could do was talk about Shelley's heart.

At one of my father's funerals a woman appeared with scratches on her hands from having tried to catch too many birds. At one of my father's funerals, a child bored breathing holes into the casket. At one of my father's funerals, the river cracked through the walls--fish leapt into the coffin

At one of my father's funerals, he poked his head through a portal. "Now anything is possible," he said.

At one of my father's funerals, Jesus showed up—tortured and celestial. The synchronized weepers' choreographed tears fell like musical notes.

At one of my father's funerals, he said, "What do I hear for this lovely casket. Barely used."

A man in a grayish robe raised his hand. "Jesus," I said.

At one of my father's funerals, I was older than my father. "You look like hell," he said.

At one of my father's funerals, we thought my uncle brought flowers, but it was really a rash. One of my aunt's came with an alibi.

My father said, "If I am not conscious of my death, then how can I be dead?"

The doctor listed the symptoms and pushed his finger into my father's chest in order to find the heart.

At one of my father's funerals, the bounty hunter wept into his warrant. A fisherman laid a whimsical fish on the coffin. At one of my father's funerals a fire started. The tow truck driver arrived with the flowers. At one of my father's funerals, the funeral director dipped a cigarette into embalming fluid. The driver of the hearse was picked up for DWI. The bootlegger comforted me. "They'll never be anyone like your father," he said to me.

At one of my father's funerals, the tour bus came in with the Alzheimer patients who were trying to say the right words to the family. The stroke patients tilted beautifully in their card table chairs.

At one of my father's funerals, I developed the power to exchange organs with my dying relatives. When I left the room I had the liver of a drunken uncle. At one of my father's funerals, we read the romantics and Keats showed up. At one of my father's funerals, I cried, and no one asked me why.

At one of my father's funerals, a man carried an umbrella. A woman carried a packed suitcase. My father announced that he was afraid of falling.

I watched a tear roll down the umbrella.

At one of my father's funerals, we played cards while my father sat in his mahogany drawer. While he was trying to untie the knot in his head, my mother deposited her voice in the cochlea of his ear. The priest said, "Now what are we going to do?"

A girl announced she had had a dream about a traveling funeral.

I pondered a handful of birds.

At one of my father's funerals, Katherine Hepburn showed up. Her beauty seared our brains. A big bold hat tipped over her eye. She had orchid shimmer on her lips.

At one of my father's funerals, a woman showed me her hands and said, "This is what happens when you try to catch birds." I was an adolescent. I announced to the girl, "I keep a book called Magic under my bed."

At one of my father's funerals, someone mentioned the frozen dream where all the dream characters are trapped behind a thin layer of ice. Eventually we rowed the coffin across the lake. At one of my father's funerals, my mother inconsolably danced.