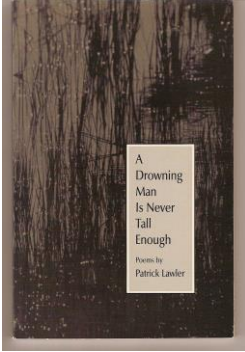


**A Drowning Man is Never Tall Enough
(University of Georgia Press, 1990)**



SAMPLES FROM A DROWNING MAN IS NEVER TALL ENOUGH

Subsong

The cardinal bursts red in the room.
A sprung trap. Velocity. Luculence.
Its terror ricochets. So this
Is the pursuit of the self
When the self isn't there. Where once
It tapped at its reflection in the
Bedroom glass, now it darts without
A purpose. With a little luck, it
Shoots back through the hole
That had been its body, squeezes
Back into the comfortable sky.
I clap the storm window to the frame.
I return from my experiment. In the tree
Where it sits, it opens up,
Like a slashed wrist, red, radiant.

Prison Guard

Every time my father sees me he apologizes
For forgetting to make duplicates of his keys.
All the while he is intent on watching my hands.
It's all right, I explain. When he looks at a butterfly,
My father reaches for his thumbprint. The job did that;
It made him half certain he was only partially there.
Though retired, he still tells the stories:
The tricks played on him at head count,
The lengthy interrogations over missing spoons.
The flashlight he shot into bed clothes.
My father doesn't leave the trailer anymore.
From the same small window where the night tips in,
He watches. The book with the pictures helps
Him identify the things that he sees: a bird
Landing in a tree like a burglar's shoe,
A lilac, a marigold, an auto.
This way when we're together we have something
To say. But the points we arrive at aren't there.
And after I leave, he wipes what I've touched with a rag.

The Survivor Does Not Go Away

I send him to pick up packages,
To make deliveries of ice.
He doesn't.
I tell him to find a hobby: hagiology,
Astronomy. "Be immersible," I advise.
He has nothing to do; he plops
In the doorway like a man cut down
For dinner. I leave train schedules in his pockets;
They stop in his hands.
He dresses to disappear but never to depart.
The scarf hangs from his neck
Like the arm of a dirty child.
When the snow is exact, he looks in the glass.
He will never go away from his hunger.
I tell him to write a poem which will not allow
Him to survive. Absence begins to suffice.
He makes a list of what is missing.