

4 X 100

by Howie Good

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WHY WE LIKE IT:

Poetry masquerades as prose in these minimalist post-millennial, neo-apocalyptic lyrical micros that fly in the face of the predictable with the heady riff of wet graffiti. The author's mastery of compressed form (100 words each) unloads a quantum charge that powerhouses through this deeply beautiful slam dunk quartet. Quote: But all I can see when I look up is a pair of mourning doves returning to the white oak tree, and the wind moving in fits and starts through the leaves, and it's like the leaves get angry—scream and yell, and throw things and slam doors.' It's the difference between talent and wannabe, kids.

Safety Instructions for the Twenty-First Century

You probably won't look like the real you. Stay calm when you come upon it. Face it and stand upright. Speak firmly to it. Do what you can to appear larger – raise your arms or open your jacket if you're wearing one. You want to convince it you aren't prey and may in fact be a danger to it. Give it a way to escape, but if it attacks, don't panic and run. People have fought it with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools, and their bare hands. So remain standing or at least try to get back up.

The King Is Dead

The night Elvis died on the toilet he was a circus without wild animals. He kept begging for water in a faint voice. The people down there, they drink a lot of soda. Some share. Some are

bossy. Some want the ice for themselves. Some carry many small rocks, or a shell, or one big stone. Then they get bored. They eat flowers, trees, and insects. It's new for them to eat rattlesnake and cactus. I didn't expect them to eat those. Maybe it's not important, like how the windows face west and can be too bright toward late afternoon.

Demolition Zone

The authorities were knocking down buildings without telling anyone beforehand. A little girl was able to crawl out from under the debris, grinning, angelic, committed to the outrageous thing, to be alive in spaces designed to kill her. "This has to stop," I thought, but I should have actually said something. God, I was stupid. It's now a whole year later, and the original inhabitants still haven't returned, haven't even tried. So I play with the placement of tattoos. There's a heart skewered by a dagger, there's a flying skull, there's Saint Jerome hearing the trumpet of the Last Judgment.

The Gathering

I go out into the yard for a smoke. There's just enough daylight remaining that shadows in the shapes of beasts and angels crowd around me. One or another of them says – in a weighty voice I feel in my body rather than hear – that it's raining plane parts from the sky. But all I can see when I look up is a pair of mourning doves returning to the white oak tree, and the wind moving in fits and starts through the leaves, and it's like the leaves get angry – scream and yell, and throw things, and slam doors.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Conciseness—the highest possible concentration of meaning or feeling in the smallest possible space—has always seemed to me to be a defining characteristic of poetry. I intentionally limit myself to 100 words for each prose poem because it challenges me to be concise—somewhat in the same way the sonnet form challenges the sonnet writer to be fluid within a rigid structure. The number 100 also has interesting cultural associations. One hundred in our culture is used to signify excellence in quality (100 on a test) or effort (giving one hundred percent). In appropriating '100' for these eerie little prose poems I am trying to turn the conventional valuation of excellence against itself.

BIO:

Howie Good is on the pavement, thinking about the government.