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**WHY I LIKE THEM:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... I am happy to report that Howie Good's, "8 Prose Poems," are as enjoyable to read as they are to think about its poetics. I write this as a sit in a classroom substituting for 10th grade English and I can't help but think how I*

*would tell these students why these pieces of prose are not only stories but poetic, and that the genre of writing never limits one's writing away from the natural poetry of language. Juxtaposed memories, compounded images a top one another, the straight line to the reader with no additional fluff, the longing of peace with nothingness, the humor, the joy, the sadness, the kinetic movement that keeps the words grounded and not thrown into the oblivion of ephemeral emptiness or shorn of its meaning by the intent of performance, the need to express through tight metaphor, putting the impact of language first while providing the foundation to fall back on as it strikes you. Good's poetry/prose provides a backdrop, a fold to lay in, to experience the sensation of feeling something, anything, and that is the goal. Here is a prose that reminds me why poetry has a cadence on the heart. Well done. (Spacing is author's own.)*

*Five Stars*

### **QUALITY QUOTABLES (for the love of language...)**

Coming around a curve in the road, an ambulance with flashing lights but no siren is taking a person away. The crows flap up with much annoyed cawing. There has been no trial. There is no time. I watch the lights out of sight.

I'm waiting for the sunshine that was forecast, and while I wait, I feel weirdly afraid, kind of like a weak-wristed novice juggler expected to juggle on ice with serious knives.

### **Death to the Toad King**

The Talmud asks, "Can you get a rash from acting rashly?" An intelligent response requires having a knotty, twisty brain. In the pages of this month's Haddasah Magazine, Auschwitz survivors share treasured recipes – kitchen smells grisly mingling with human smoke. I have a memory from Jewish sleepaway camp, how in the grass behind our bunk, the hectoring buzz of insects loud in our ears, we caught frogs and toads and condemned them to death. No interfering adults ever went back there, just us, a bunch of 11-year-old boys simmering in the summer heat, Cub Scout pocket knives clutched in our eager hands.

## **Always**

There is always a miracle going unannounced. There is always a superannuated star of 1980s action movies exposing his mummified balls. There is always a sacred fount in a mysterious woods. There is always a god in need of prison rehabilitation. There is always a bored cow, big, ludicrous head stuck through a fence, staring morosely at passing cars. There is always a passing car. There is always a stymied writer on the verge of giving up. There is always a woman spread naked across a table. There is always eight or more soldiers crowding around the table grinning down at her.

## **Dog on a Leash**

The three crows gathered in the middle of the road are pecking at the crushed carcass of a rabbit that must have been run over during the night. My dog yanks me toward the murder scene. I yank back on his leash. He chokes and coughs and stops pulling. Every day is another day of struggle against something I can't quite see. Coming around a curve in the road, an ambulance with flashing lights but no siren is taking a person away. The crows flap up with much annoyed cawing. There has been no trial. There is no time. I watch the lights out of sight.

## **GPS**

I always do what it says, or at least try to, now turning slight right, now turning sharp left, as if hypnotized by its voice, so soothingly polite and feminine that you can forget sometimes that it's just a bot that's talking. With its informed guidance, I pass around rather than through the oppressive gloom of decaying cities. I pass in the dark over lighted bridges. As much as anything can, it's able to see how this stretch of road leads to that stretch of road and how the many roads lead inevitably to my destination. Why wrestle with a map anymore, why pull up to a stranger on a street corner and ask for directions, when you can just go trustingly where the machine tells you?

## **Spooky Music**

Don't know if you've noticed, but the quotations that people post on Facebook, they're always being misattributed to Abraham Lincoln, or if not to Lincoln, then to Mark Twain or George Orwell. No one seems concerned about it except me, and who am I to correct the record? At most I might go two days without speaking through clenched teeth or seeing burned vehicles along the highway or hearing muffled sobs and screams. The news when it comes on TV ought to come on accompanied by spooky background music. I'm waiting for the sunshine that was forecast, and while I wait, I feel weirdly afraid, kind of like a weak-wristed novice juggler expected to juggle on ice with serious knives.

## **What's Wrong with Me**

In the alley behind a strip mall, where the dumpsters overflow and a gang of feral cats is prowling, a stubbly man in a neon orange stocking cap takes long swigs from a paper bag. I know without knowing how I know that all things are the same thing to the dark. Justice would require that here, here beneath cracked and oft-repatched blacktop, a deep forest be swaying. Maybe there's something wrong with me, but sometimes I catch myself thinking that it might be necessary to kill what is in order to bring about what is not. Ever heard the expression, "When you build high, folks will jump"? The sentinel crow on the power line barks a warning.

## **Cryptogram**

I feel a tingling in my chest that usually signals the onset of a panic attack, but instead your nakedness spills like a crackle of lightning across the sheets, and as befits life in a land of nonsense rhymes, I'm suddenly alive to the difference it makes if it's "world's" (possessive) or "worlds" (plural), and why otherwise there would be heretics burned and witches hanged, shocking new twists to thousand-year-old perversions, for instance, the patron saint of shopping mall Santas sucking at Christ's wounds, and first thing in the morning, too.



## Love Suicide

I lived in a coffinlike room under the eaves. It was stifling in the summer, freezing in the winter, and grim all the time. From the sealed porthole that served as my one window, I mostly saw swirling mists and menacing shadows. One dark, damp morning a government surveyor appeared at my door. His face was blotchy and bloated like that of a love suicide pulled from the river after three days in the water. He asked for advice on what to do with his sadness. I had none. Animals think and feel and people still kill and eat them.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *These pieces touch on big topics – mortality, the human propensity for cruelty violence, authoritarian technology – but always try to do so within a narrative framework and in personal terms. While the pieces aren't realistic per se – or dry and humorless – they deal with very real things. Oh, and they were pretty hard to write.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Howie Good's latest poetry books are *The Horse Were Beautiful*, available from Grey Book Press, and *Swimming in Oblivion: New and Selected Poems* from Redhawk Publications.