



# Desecrations

Howie Good

# *Desecrations*

Howie Good



Fowlpox Press  
©MMXII Howie Good  
All Rights Reserved  
ISBN: 978-0-9881088-2-0

# Desecrations

Howie Good  
[goodh@newpaltz.edu](mailto:goodh@newpaltz.edu)  
155 Grand St.

By  
Howie Good

©2012 by Howie Good

Published by Fowlpox Press  
[www.fowlpox.tk](http://www.fowlpox.tk)

## License Agreement

This ebook is licensed for the personal enjoyment of the original purchaser and should not be copied, transferred, distributed, traded, or sold to third parties without the expressed written permission of the author. Please respect the copyright of the author by not sharing unauthorized copies.

ISBN: 978-0-9881088-2-0

Cover design and layout by Virgil Kay

Table of Contents  
Quartet  
A Cure for What Ails You  
The Suicide Project  
    RSVP  
Blind Man's Bluff  
    And So On  
    Here's The Deal  
    Ellipsis  
    Prescription  
    Marco Polo  
    Love at Sixty  
Prosthetic Dreams  
The Predicament of Aftermath  
    Strange Roads  
    Desecrations  
Voyage to the First of December  
    An American Dream  
    Unfinished Furniture  
    The Blue Hour  
    Suspicion  
Waking Up in Recovery  
    Amygdala  
    Apocalypse Tango  
Monkeys with Typewriters  
    The Scream  
On the Anniversary of My Demise  
    Children of Paradise  
    Ode  
History is Made at Night  
    Storm Coming

## QUARTET

**1**

I had just turned six. The universal symbol for handicapped hadn't been invented yet. Birds dragging broken wings left their black footprints on the stairs.

**2**

My parents made me take piano lessons. The piano hated me. I spent Hanukkah watching Christmas lights blink on and off on the house across the street.

**3**

My shadow walked ahead. It seemed odd that the stairs that went up were the same stairs that went down.

**4**

A man stood washing an apple at the sink. All the windows facing the other side of the world were open. Veiled women beckoned him into the Kasbah. The X on the sidewalk marks the spot where he landed.

## **A CURE FOR WHAT AILS YOU**

**1**

My head has become an ungovernable city of murderers and thieves. I can only stare at something for so long before the police start coming around. After all this rain, a body hangs from a neighbor's tree. Don't listen to what the flies say. If nobody loves you, somebody can still fear you.

**2**

I didn't discover that the ocean was dead until months after it died. Refugees from the pages of banned books ask directions to the future. All the things that might help should be indexed somewhere. I have begun a list in my head: plantain for colds, raspberry for stomachaches, red clover for nerves.

## THE SUICIDE PROJECT

1

Everyone  
who knew you  
knew you  
loved guns,

& when  
you pressed  
the nickel-  
plated barrel  
of a favorite  
under your chin,

the winos  
drinking  
in the shadows  
of the park  
stumbled,

& a bee  
zoomed up  
from the depths  
of a flower,

a striped  
spaceship  
escaping  
the monotonous  
gravity  
of Earth.

2

Death made  
a black wreath  
of its red  
& wrinkled hands,

& you climbed through  
into a garden  
only moments away  
& lighted by rain.

## **RSVP**

I looked for the house while also trying to watch the road. The slower I drove, the harder it became. Up since sunrise, the bride was still combing her thinning brown hair. A guest had left a dead bird on the porch as a gift, curiously without any blood or marks of violence on it - nothing, the groom thought, a war can't fix. Everyone felt exiled from everyone else, but the minister after a few drinks greeted each of us familiarly. He seemed surprised that this was all my arms could hold.

## **BLIND MAN'S BLUFF**

There are so many cute little blondes that sometimes I confuse their names. Caffeine withdrawal intensifies the effect. Only later was the true source of the buzzing I heard revealed. And I had thought it was a winged horse trapped behind the glass! It's the kind of thing I like to ponder as I walk down to the corner mailbox, passing trees and windows and a dog chewing on a police whistle. I hardly even care if the mailbox isn't there, or if it is, that I can't see it.

## **AND SO ON**

Mr. Death visited a hospital out of professional curiosity, searched unsuccessfully for Yeats' grave throughout the south of France, walked on the beach in winter, when the ocean is flat and gray, the way he likes it. His interest now was in precise things - caliber, killing range, etc. - and as he considered whether to use a .22 on you or something poisonous, his face assumed the benign expression of a secret bomb factory.

**HERE'S THE DEAL**

Be a pale & lean earthquake,  
& I will be a heap of broken violins,

be the circus girl resting  
atop a staircase in flames,

& I will be a dynamite explosion  
in a foreign language,

be a pair of six-foot pink lips  
painted by sheet lightning,

& I will stop on my way home  
to pick up the milk & bread.

## **ELLIPSIS**

An old young man in a stained T-shirt  
and with a bruise under one eye  
lunges out of the convenience store.  
A dog sniffs the rear end of another dog.  
*Mister, got sixty cents?*  
Once there was a great painter  
without money for paint and brushes.  
I reach into my pocket.  
*Hey!* a seagull cries. *Hey!*  
though I am miles from any sea.

## **PRESCRIPTION**

A decrepit usherette in a man's  
suit coat shone her light in my face.  
Nobody would tell me what I did,  
only that this never happened.  
*The mind*, the doctor said above the roar,  
*is an unruly puppy*. Why every morning  
I must swallow a pill with my juice,  
the road still climbing through a dark forest  
that loves the world just as it is.

## **MARCO POLO**

I sat in a room of eager doctoral students who nodded sagely even as the professor drew pentagrams on the board. Women with scratch 'n' sniff skin would enter my thoughts, but avoid leaving their names. The moon appeared from somewhere behind me like the holed white hull of a dream. There's a suspicion that Marco Polo did not tell half of what he saw. Birds of certain countries could sing in three languages and lie and grieve in none.

## LOVE AT SIXTY

1

The heart plucked  
from your chest still beating

stumbles down the stairs  
in mud-caked boots,

while I pause at the bottom  
to think of the word,

what sounds like the killer hurricane  
they say God commissioned

or, more likely, the noise  
of a gunshot in a silent film.

2

Old, I am old, & a paraplegic angel  
rides upon my back,

somebody else's yearning  
is growing in my chest

& bristles like the black scales  
of a suit of Japanese armor

& sparkles even more  
right after & when it rains.

## **PROSTHETIC DREAMS**

A bird I can't identify by its red markings visits me, holding a playing card in its beak. I feel elated to finally be remembered. But when I grab for the card, the bird darts away.

Come back, I yell, and the bird does. I realize then that its markings are actually splashes of paint or maybe even blood. The shock wakes me up.

I once took thirteen years to write a poem, if you count the mass of scar tissue that throbs in our dreams.

## **THE PREDICAMENT OF AFTERMATH**

Your father mistook them for cold pills. You called Poison Control laughing so hard that the man on the other end became offended. "Lady," he snapped, "it's not funny!" This was back when we first began dating, a time before the time the shadows of branches could only communicate in thin, hopeless gestures, and if not played regularly, the piano would forget its sound.

## STRANGE ROADS

1

"Whose orange cat is that?"  
The landlord of hell  
maintains a blank face.  
Like the sign that says,  
No Parking Any Time,  
the austere logic of it.  
Just nod, and we'll move  
to a city that doesn't exist.  
And take the cat.

2

Seven people dead, the news said.  
I study the coolly swaying hips  
of the woman walking in front of me.  
This is all the music there is.  
Or maybe this music is all there is.  
See the difference? A lone baby shoe  
at the entrance to a dark alley.

3

You ask where we are.  
I stare straight ahead  
as if I haven't heard you.

There's no good answer,  
or there can be more than one,  
just as you can choose  
to fall out of love with me,  
or you can choose  
to hit the "Send" button.

In the abrupt days that follow,  
an insect-like buzz  
insinuates itself into everything.

Nobody seems  
to know how to fix it,  
and some seem  
not to even want it fixed.

## **DESECRATIONS**

I wonder how that can be. The recipe calls for a pinch of sorrow, the clouds beyond the rain-smearred kitchen window like the gloomy thoughts of stranded whales. I try to remember the last time honesty was the best policy. The autobiography of a lipstick-stained cigarette filter I consult is no help. So many people stumble out of their mothers with drought-stricken faces, all crooked lines and lumpy shadows, that I don't know where to look first. Someone suggests the waiting area, slumped on a molded plastic chair.

## **VOYAGE TO THE FIRST OF DECEMBER**

Many of them had the shaved heads of inmates or raw recruits. Others lived in dark, windowless rooms built from bales of human hair. *Imagine you're lying in the shade of beautiful trees,* the meditation CD said. Objective conditions wouldn't allow it. The mad shuffled down the street in shoes without laces. Every day ended in an ellipsis. . . and began with a midnight movie on TV about a failed plot to kill Hitler.

**AN AMERICAN DREAM**

All night I follow  
the same path  
the bullet traveled,

& when I wake  
before light,

there's the heavy metal music  
of garbage men  
banging garbage cans.

## **UNFINISHED FURNITURE**

You want to ask  
if there was  
a loud splash  
when that boy  
fell out of the sky.

You want me  
to tell you  
where he kept  
the amphetamines  
that he used.

Sorry. Don't know.

But I got paint  
on my shirt  
and pants,  
a color called  
Lighthouse Shadows.

## **THE BLUE HOUR**

God Has a Big Eraser,  
the letters spelled out just before fading.  
The tender light of twilight was leaking away.  
There were people on the street,  
but they scrupulously avoided my eyes.  
Shadows invited everyone in.  
And such music! Like falling water  
or the roundness of a woman's breast.

## **SUSPICION**

Plainclothesmen prowled the train station all night. Everyone arriving on the 8:10 looked like a fugitive. An old junky who made his living stealing overcoats was followed by a parade of children chanting his name. The cops must have been waiting for someone else. In those days, a suspect sat on a stool with a hot spotlight on him, and no matter how much I begged, my parents wouldn't let me keep the motherless babies, slimy and blind, born in a dark corner of the garden.

## **WAKING UP IN RECOVERY**

It was late at night inside me. The nurse on duty believed in the therapeutic properties of art. Bullet-riddled bodies stood around my bed making small talk. Ethics was discussed back then, when it was discussed at all, as what you shouldn't do rather than what you should. A bird might just as well have been pecking out my conscience. At the edge of my vision was a clock without hands. No one I met considered it hypocrisy to dream in fragments, but bleed in full sentences.

## **AMYGDALA**

**1**

Migratory birds that should be hopping a ride on the wind stroll between our legs. When did it become unlawful to squeal in pleasure? you ask. I shrug. What I call an attack of conscience another person might call the amygdala. I'm the most aggrieved of all the people on line, with a heart like a booby-trapped car.

**2**

The fat pharmacist wears a white coat he can't quite button over his stomach. Smiling ingratiatingly, I hand him my prescription. He glances at it and just shakes his head. Ah, me! Another day without painkillers, another day as court jester to a humorless universe.

**3**

A rejoinder occurs to me only months later while watching the horse's ears quiver. Official-looking documents stick to the bottom of the tall, steel-mesh fence where a noisy wind has blown them. The prisoner gripped by the elbow insists that's not his signature. I go back inside just so I can listen instead to the baby babble. My point isn't what you think it is, which is the point.

## **APOCALYPSE TANGO**

Night crowded around, so dark I didn't notice the shadow with red freckles on one hand raise a pistol with the other. The unwounded fled faster than the general laws of physics could explain. When did mercy become another thing to especially avoid? I slept under the For Sale by Owner sign on your lawn. It wasn't safe anymore to think out loud. Rumors circulated through town as to why. Somebody said it was the woman upstairs; somebody else, electronics assembled in China. I felt cold spread like a stain of angels and rust along the inside of my skull.

## **MONKEYS WITH TYPEWRITERS**

**1**

The season slowed in its turning to allow the sun to catch up. What I thought was thunder must have been the rumble of panic.

**2**

Squalid yellow light. An empty street. My clothes are old, but they're clean.

**3**

We're like the ships of Odysseus, my Lit professor said, always being blown off course. Or maybe I just imagined it, preferring the emptiness smoldering underneath everything. We've all lost things. We've all had things taken. And not only things. A roommate with wrists emphatically slit.

**4**

A door opened into a big room where an exam was underway. There were one million monkeys with typewriters at long tables. Some could have used my help spelling "catastrophe."

**5**

Every day is somewhere we've never been before. It's less a story than a situation.

**6**

The street was full of snow and the homeless. You joked that God must be living in another city under an assumed name. When we were little, the simple three-letter words on the blackboard, CAT RAT MAT HAT, seemed to me to make a song. Now there's suicide attacks and Zolof and the clock's audible heartbeat. I wish I was a wolf in the mountains. Wolves, the book said, don't wish to be found.

## **THE SCREAM**

I want a clock without hands,  
and someone to agree  
that the moon looks  
just like a frozen scream.

I want to find a tattoo  
of a woman's name  
when I roll up my sleeve,

and for the millions  
that regimes have murdered  
to cross back over  
on a bridge of bones.

I want to bang on a can  
to spread the alarm.

## **ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF MY DEMISE**

Sleep is a box with holes punched in the lid, and when you emerge from it, you're amazed that I'm still scattered like musical clues all over the mall parking lot, unusually full for this time of year with naked blondes and images of the national bird and a few old winos, one of whom, singing something about Jesus' wounds, cradles armfuls of the hymnals used to feed dumpster fires and supernovas.

## **CHILDREN OF PARADISE**

Out back  
flowed the same

river twice.

No other blue  
was quite as blue

as the blue  
of a blue Sno-  
Cone.

## ODE

You hid in the subzero darkness, your name, Blooma, Yiddish for flower. Retreating soldiers staggered down the road past your peasant father's farm. Oh, doomed little girl, even stars disintegrate! The plum trees you loved have long since slit their wrists. Now whenever I think of you, I try picturing us standing on a small stone bridge over bright water, you pointing out a swan with a head like a big wedge of white wedding cake.

## **HISTORY IS MADE AT NIGHT**

While  
we somehow  
sleep,

the old men  
in orange  
safety vests

scoop up  
roadkill  
with shovels

& fling it  
into the future.

## **STORM COMING**

**1**

I let the dog in.  
Dogs don't leave  
fingerprints.

**2**

Every sad utterance  
of the wind is a lie.  
Every word it writes down  
has another spelling.

**3**

Fireworks are illegal,  
the dark & sparkling memory  
of a garbled dream.  
All night I hold  
a match to the fuse.

Bio:

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the new poetry collection, *Dreaming in Red*, from Right Hand Pointing. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to a crisis center, which you can read about here: <https://sites.google.com/site/rhplanding/howie-good-dreaming-in-red>. He is also the author of numerous chapbooks, including most recently *The Devil's Fuzzy Slippers* from Flutter Press and *Personal Myths* from Writing Knights Press. He has two other chapbooks forthcoming, *Fog Area* from Dog on a Chain Press and *The Death of Me* from Pig Ear Press.

