

Threatening Weather

poems by Howie Good

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This PDF download is a companion to the original online text/audio publication of *Threatening Weather*, available at <http://wschap5.wordpress.com>.

QUALMS

Who was it who said color is light on fire?

In an unnamed city, rain falling everywhere,
I slip a worn-down cafeteria fork

into my pocket.

Today would have been Thomas Edison's birthday,
or maybe it was yesterday. A statue

at the edge of the sea shivers in a blue sun.

WELCOME TO HARD TIMES

1

He was still a long way away when he limped into view. Maybe the airport was fogged in, maybe the disease was contagious. He rolled his suitcase over the railroad tracks, bumpity bump, drenched in the coldness of passing headlights. It was a little past midnight, an hour I once knew well. A woman with her throat slashed stepped out of the doorway and boldly offered the garish wound for him to kiss.

2

I had a job as a guard in the local museum of antiquities. On most days, the visitors were few, but serious. It may have been a mistake for the captain to order an extra tot of grog for his men. Sailors from the ship eyed the red fire axe on the wall. I am ashamed of mankind, was all one said.

3

What strange weather we were having. The only light came from the flashes of electrical activity associated with panic attacks. I tried to sleep, but a so-called colleague phoned with a question. You OK? she asked. I pretended I didn't understand. It began to snow where the general stuck a round-headed pin in the map.

AN ARMED MAN LURKS IN AMBUSH

1

Ladies wave their handkerchiefs in greeting, men lift their hats. The passing flock of crows spreads a bewilderment of shadows. Police disguised as woodcutters and Lithuanian tailors watch from behind lampposts. Each day brings less daylight, but also lessons in how to hull seeds. I look up at colossal windows arched like tombstones. All along and without claiming it, I've had a seat on the wagon that carries my coffin.

2

Oh, to be old and stoop-shouldered and walking through streets that aren't there, pastel birds from discount pet stores rioting like exasperated horns and rattles and a statue of the dictator ducking into a doorway in a shapeless cape of melting snow.

3

I borrowed my broken yellow teeth from diseased longings. Icky, the child said. Even thieves had lost faith in the face value of paper money. Despite the film of dust on everything, winter retained some of the glitter of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. An old lady leaning a ladder against the side of her house was the only one in the village to escape. What next? Contact me with suggestions.

THREATENING WEATHER

Precision instruments. Camouflage prints. A necklace of raindrops. What a world it is!
An army of shadows occupies the capitals of Europe. Ghosts drift up from smokestacks.
Night comes earlier than usual, faces a disturbing shade of orange. But only later, when
the teenage hostess at the Greek diner smiles at us to follow, does it occur to me to
wonder whether mirrors retain a memory of every person they ever knew.

MAL DE MER

1

What's the weather there? he asked. Some people prefer the sea. The taxi had dropped me off and then climbed the sharp hill that led to all the years ahead. The man put a finger to his lips. We had worked out a scheme – a woman like the girly pink rose machine-embroidered on the back of her backpack.

2

He invoked the rule of thirds, but couldn't explain it. All I knew was that it had something to do with pictures. I had gotten a price from him. Bullets were extra.

3

I met a woman you never met. She talked about the jellyfish incident and removing fragments from her flesh. She said what she most missed was the strangeness of daily life. All of France mourned her.

TINY HEART ATTACKS

1

We were children together, licked by the same black dog, no witnesses present when a bloody ax was found among the tools in the backyard shed.

2

Years later, we went to live in one of the rectangle states, a necklace of red berries around her neck. Our nearest neighbor was the far-off weeping of a long freight train.

3

A canary usually doesn't chirp so much. That other noise was dusk gusting toward us across a stubble field. If there were ever records of it, they've been lost.

SPRING MELT

1

A woman tries on a straw hat like the local peasants wear, the short blue jacket of Parisian street sweepers. It's not my mother or she'd know what became of the earlier violet man planting in the sun.

2

The train clanks into the station. Sunflowers with purple eyes search the faces for clues.

3

Rain machine-guns down a couple dashing for the shelter of a doorway. A cold voice answers when I call the helpline. My mouth is full of debris. I shouldn't compare, but Van Gogh also had eighteen teeth pulled and yellow poured through his curtainless window all morning.

4

Libraries had died, and the snow was almost gone. "If the storm within gets too loud," the man said, standing against the whitewashed church, "I take a glass too much to stun myself." A general emerged from the woods waving his slouch hat on the tip of his sword. For the first time in months, I could see long, long rows of graves again.

NIGHTINGALE WITH A TOOTHACHE

Doomsday, a Thursday, dawns gray and wet. I meet a woman with a backside like a pear. The city wears a slouch hat. We move from one color into another. The words “mushroom” and “music” are contiguous in most English dictionaries. She brings an ancient wind-up phonograph with a horn loudspeaker. I give up trying to have the snow painted black. Everything we do is music. There’s something odd about seeing a piano burn.

PASTELS

1

Angels in pink silk shoes decorated with rosebuds wandered through the rooms. It was the house of a hanged man. The cat made every effort to appear elegantly bored.

2

A wheelbarrow of weathered skulls stood off to the side, white in the morning, lilac during the day, orange in the evening.

3

The muse was in the woods. She had handed me over to the firing squad. A blond light pervaded as softly as a piano playing.

THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

1

Several dead sparrows
dangle from the clothesline.
Should we leave

or press the doorbell?
The hostage in the video
blinked in Morse code.

2

I shout for help.
There are gallows at every crossroad.

Don't forget to be happy,
the automated message says.

3

Blood provides
the only splash of color.

The sensation of drowning
is added to the list

of what's not allowed.

About the author

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the full-length poetry collections *Lovesick* (Press Americana, 2009), *Heart With a Dirty Windshield* (BeWrite Books, 2010), and *Everything Reminds Me of Me* (Desperanto, 2011), as well as 28 print and digital poetry chapbooks. He has been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net and Web anthologies. He is a contributing editor to the online literary journal *Common-Line*, co-editor of the online nonfiction journal *Left Hand Waving*, and co-founder and -editor (with Dale Wisely) of the digital chapbook publisher White Knuckle Press (<http://www.whiteknucklepress.com>).

About the editor/publisher

Nic Sebastian's first collection, edited by Jill Alexander Essbaum, is *Forever Will End On Thursday* (Lordly Dish Nanopress) and her work appears in numerous online poetry journals. She blogs at *Very Like A Whale* and is founder-editor of *Whale Sound*, an online audio poetry journal featuring her readings of the work of web-active contemporary poets. *Whale Sound Audio Chapbooks* has also published:

- *Handmade Boats* by H.K. Hummel (<http://wschap1.wordpress.com>)
- *Studies in Monogamy* by Nicelle Davis (<http://wschap2.wordpress.com>)
- *Cloud Studies* by Christine Klocek-Lim (<http://wschap3.wordpress.com>)
- *Dark Refuge* by Edward Byrne (<http://wschap4.wordpress.com>)

About the photographer

Jennifer L. Tomaloff (b. 1972) | bending light into verse (put it down) | takes: pictures | likes: animals | hates: people | see: *Bending Light into Verse* (<http://bendinglightintoverse.com>)