

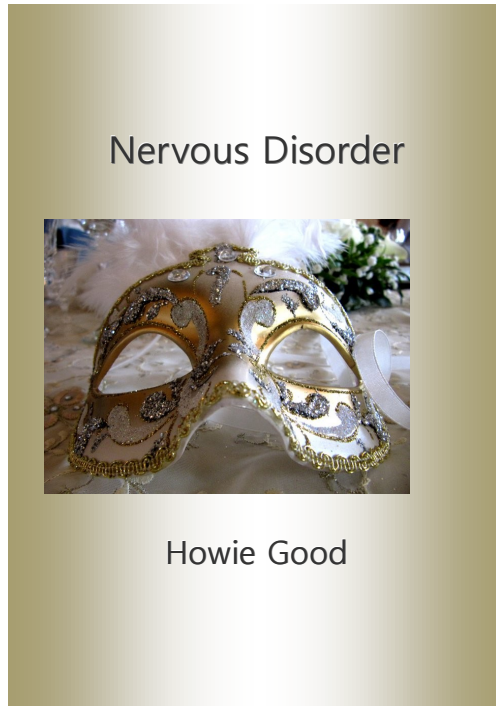
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Origami Poetry Project™

Nervous Disorder
Howie Good © 2012



CHARLIE CHAN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

He picked cherries from a tree and threw them down to us. “Nut easy to crack often empty,” he said. Maybe he heard us laugh, maybe not. All his life he liked to wander through cemeteries. The most terrible dreams blew about the headstones. “Actions,” he said, “speak louder than French.” We weren’t watching as closely as we might have. Later he was found wearing only one shoe and repeating, “At night all cats are black.”

NERVOUS DISORDER

1
The sign outside the office said, You are requested to close your eyes. She did. In those far-off days, illnesses had other names – bloody flux, Bright’s disease, consumption. Her doctor was so deaf he needed an ear trumpet to be able to hear the patients screaming in pain.

2
Traveling through streets of winos, we held hands, the driver taking us wherever he had been paid to go. You spoke of home, the fog, a funeral attended by only four mourners. I wanted to say something, too, but it was now night and rainy, and I had just enough body to keep a soul in.

3
The newspaper advertises the apocalypse. I think about changing my name and leaving, but can’t while the sparrows in the street are talking about me. And where’s there to go, anyway, on a morning being built from cannibalized parts?

4
Everyone I know who has a job hates it. When the alarm on the heart monitor starts to shrill, the nurse covers her ears.

5
It could happen. A virus appears in my email claiming to be you. And though there’s no wind, the puddles shiver.

THE GOLDEN AGE

1
Everyone’s head was full of words and stories, maps of sorts, and when they shut their eyes, they saw a white summer dress dashed with blood. People were rarely lonely. If they killed, it was for the same reasons that bridges sometimes fail.

2
Dot-dot-dash in Morse code means “u.” A man jammed a fistful into his mouth. He had climbed the iron staircase toward a rumor of angels, what they call Rembrandt Lighting. Somewhere near, a heart was powering down. A horse-drawn ambulance eventually shambled into view. The sky by then was small and vague. Tell me what wine goes with it.

TRAMPI TRAMPI TRAMPI

I was born on a cold day sixty years ago today. Something wrong? Everyone who happens upon me asks. I remember the bottle of pills in my pocket. May cause drowsiness, the label says. Let’s hope so. The pills are more pink than red. I pop one. It’s how they do things here. Ten minutes pass. There are still many mentally ill New Yorkers. I pop another. The ground trembles with the footfalls of the rain tramping up from the South.

WARD 6

I wasn’t there. What’s so difficult to grasp? Lack of faith intensified the effect. The same young nurse woke me every fifteen minutes to check my vitals, the flowers on the wallpaper opening just a crack. I looked away. The sun was coming up, naked and shivering. A burning freight train crawled endlessly through the background. There are probably better words to describe it, but I have been broken and mended and broken again.