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Funny You Should Ask

Prose poems

Brad Rose



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It All Depends

Admiring the corporality of animals, we're parked in the ghost car. I have an indoor question: How many misspelled thoughts must I have, anyway? There's nothing more beautiful than wanting the impossible to be true, especially when it is. Time passes faster in the mountains, than it does by the sea. Like a drowned body, the sky's blue prairie floats overhead. Wind light as confetti. Maybe we should take a drive to the beach; go for a swim? I don't want to give away the ending, but I can tell you it's a beauty. No one attends their own funeral. Know what I'm saying? By the way, that outfit looks good on you. Although, it all depends on how you look at it.

Who You Are

Yesterday, while my avatar was exercising incognito, I had an epiphany in Esperanto. Of course, whenever it rains, a good roofer is hard to find. In a separate compartment, I ordered the deluxe junior—just in case the extra-medium small doesn't fit. You know how you often want things before you know what they are? That's why I like to say everything twice, especially in my sleep. In fact, before making a phone call, I rehearse what I'm going to say, so the call will go swimmingly the first time. Because I've got a pool in my backyard, some people think I've got it made. Its blue water, smooth as a snake, permanently faces the open mouth of the sky. Yesterday, I overheard Mr. A. say to Mr. B. *I hate my anonymity*. Then, from behind his disguise, Mr. B. said, *And I hate my impersonality*. It's not who you are that matters; it's who you aren't. I wonder why my attorney always carries a gun?

Outfit

Every sentence benefits from a verb. Naturally, this time of year, with everything so seasonal, it can't be prevented, so I like to be lucky, even when nobody is looking. Yesterday, for instance, I was paid in knives. Today won't last as long as yesterday, because now I'm doing things that don't have names. Why stick to my talking points? About half an hour ago, I plummeted into a seething nest of baby rattle snakes. You know how it always seems like there are more of them than there are of you. Hey, did you pick that outfit yourself?

Teeth

I lost my prescription—so I swallowed myself. Am I at a standstill or a dead end? I like to work hard whenever the task is easy. Like a shark's gills, I'm made of this gray world. Once upon a time, I dreamed I'd read a book before it was written. Now, like a one-sided coin, I have no plans. In this universe we have no choice; things have to happen. Rain falls on all six sides of the night. Water is always busy. Yesterday, I woke up early. Maybe, I should have slept in? When I learned that those school children drowned at Shipwreck Beach, I lost my appetite. *What a shame, I thought. Such pretty little teeth.*

Retraining

I am faithful. I go where my GPS tells me. The billionaires warn we must learn to make sacrifices, so now everyone will have to become a millionaire. Everyone is retraining. I have a positive attitude. Whenever I dream, I expect to wake up. In the morning, the light is bright, like a good student. My feet are where I left them. Am I happy? Some bicycles have no wheels. I wish I had wings. I wish I was traveling to heaven. I wish I was going faster. Maybe everyone gets the fate they deserve? There are 44 murders a day in the US, and roughly \$500 million to \$1.5 billion collected each year in ransom money. God is known to have a sense of humor, but sometimes it's hard to tell when he's joking.

Stolen Bikinis

Last night, I dreamed of lawyers. Hey, I don't make the law. Now, I'm eating a little packet of space food and wondering, *Do flowers like sex?* Experts say it will only get worse. When I told my shoplifter cousin, Nadine — you know, the one with that ugly bump on her head — that she might go to hell for all the bikinis she's stolen, she said, *It's not about the clothes, Clarence, it's about the weather.* Like Schrodinger's dog, I ran away.

Andromeda

Now that I've tuned-up my force field and miniaturized my plasma deflector, I'm not as anxious as I used to be about Andromeda hurtling at 70 miles per second toward the Milky Way. Of course, it's no longer business as usual. This season, I'll be selling my sweaters to the moths. I spent all day yesterday trying to make some honest mistakes, but wouldn't you know it, those beige parrots swooped in, like it was a sign of something colorful. Last night, Uncle Billy said, *Don't get too smart for your own britches. Remember, Jesus didn't need a bible.* Talk like that makes me wonder what color the Red Sea is, but I've got a feeling that ladder doesn't have any rungs. After a little hemming & hawing, to-ing & fro-ing, automatic weapon fire erupted in the strange distance. Billy leaned in, his eyes dead as a hit and run, and said, *The devil is made of asbestos, burning, Leon. Know what I'm saying?* I hunkered down, like a hole in the earth, as the stars cinched tighter in an ill-fitting sky.

Florida Hunting Buddies

I'm the background for the trees. Of course, they don't have a subconscious, but it's better than being knocked out. The world is filled with crime. It's getting harder and harder to find a place to hunt. Like a cat, I have 10 lives. I'm a hard worker. In the village of guns, you're innocent until proven guilty. Yesterday, down by the swamp, I noticed the water looked bored. Maybe it needed something better to do? Just as I was about to warn him about crocodilian bite-force, Dwayne yelled out, *Where are all the reptiles, anyway?* Dwayne was a good shot. I would have trusted him with my life.

Lucky, I Guess

I don't know why you can smell rain and lightning coming on. Same as I don't know why I married Crystal. Twice. Billy-Idol blonde, S curves smooth as hourglass sand, salt and pepper bob, she hisses venom whenever another woman smiles at me. Last night, as I made a mental list of things to avoid buying at the Dollar Store, the moths twitched against the porch's bare bulb. In the blue-white light, she stubbed out her cigarette, turned to me, and like a bored executioner, said, *I don't know about you, Lucky, but I can't sleep in all this heat.*

One Thing I Learned from John Ashbery

Look, it's Kierkegaard again, frolicking, as usual, without a hat, in the poppies. Sure, those boa constrictors are lovely, until you run out of gas, then it's back to putting all your eggs in one basket, until all hell squeezes over. Needless to say, acupuncture is needles, so by all means, don't hesitate to be late. No, those homo sapiens aren't fakes, their copies of themselves, even if they look like cardboard cutouts made from human beings. They're really authentic. Regrettably, it can't be helped.

New Clients

Just to be on the safe side, God prays to himself. That way, everybody's a winner. Of course, even with the safest surgery, there can be unexpected complications. It's hard to tell if it's due to organized crime or organized religion. Sometimes, I'm on a different frequency spectrum. Like ants at a picnic, I'm all over the place. Yesterday, I was innocently piloting my new drone above the neighbor's backyard—just wanted to give it a quick once-over—and wouldn't you know it, the twins were lounging naked again, except for their sidearms. Sure enough, there was some inadvertent gunfire, so I said to Psycho Kitty, my assistant and lucky charm, *Have you noticed how, lately, the suburbs have become such a concrete jungle?* Kitty snarled, *I don't think the twins are a gang, Terry. They look more like a cult.* The average person gets only so many winning lottery tickets in a lifetime. Today, I'm feeling lucky as a bulldozer in a China shop. Do you suppose God's accountant is accepting new clients?

Another Disappearance

This morning, I took two showers before I got in my car and drove to work. I like to be clean when I drive. You know how one thing leads to another. Collisions aren't accidents, they're coincidences. After all, this is a no-fault insurance state. Have you heard the news about reincarnation? You can't catch it twice. All the same, better luck next time! Now that the government admits there are flying saucers, I've been closely monitoring the sky for tractor beams. Light is electromagnetic radiation detectable by the human eye—simple particles and waves. As I left the house this morning, Charlene shouted, *You didn't forget your memory pills again, did you, Roy?* She hates it when I forget where I'm going. I'm glad Charlene and I are on the same planet, because every eleven seconds in the US, someone disappears. For one reason or another.

Tropical Depression

All week, I've been trying to replace the atoms in my brain. Well, actually, just in the prefrontal cortex. I don't want my brainwaves to interfere with approaching aircraft. Eventually, I'd like to optimize my energy efficiency too, you know, go the whole eight yards, but until then, I'm going to try to reverse my reverse mortgage. Ever since I got the damn thing, it's been trying to kill my house plants. But they're strong. They've only passed out a couple of times. I don't know about you, but I think we need some new planets, one's with better shapes and weather. I'm going to speak to the concierge, first thing in the morning. Have you noticed how the night crawls up into the trees to get a better look at the stars? I guess it's a multidimensional universe, after all. Astrophysicists say it's more fun that way, but they always have some trick up their sleeves. Of course, you've got to love the rain, don't you? I love the rain, even if it is artificial. Those transparent acoustics are really something. As a matter of fact, they're unheard of. And I love how the flood waters follow the invisible slope of gravity toward the silent center of the earth. Don't get me wrong, I like the fish, too—as long as they stay in the background, where they belong. Nick, my bloodthirsty barber, says I'd have a great personality, if I didn't cry eight hours every day. When I tell him it's probably just a slow-moving tropical depression, he lifts his eye patch, grabs his straight razor, and says, *Sure thing, Matey. Would you like me to take a little more off the top?*

It Adds Up

Yesterday, while power napping in my automatic hammock, I nearly wrecked my gizmo. No, I have no idea why they call it a *monkey wrench*. I guess, these days, everything is learn-by-doing. The main problem is I'm no longer a member of my inner circle. Like a hangman's knot, I'm out of the loop. It scares my wife and nearly turned the robots into vegetarians. (Don't be fooled by the meat-eating thought bubbles.) Normally, I'm not just a short story of myself, I'm an epic. But ever since the tectonic crime wave and those carnivorous millepedes, I can barely locate my fingers—even after going to great lengths. In fact, since the most recent round of their heinous acts, the think tanks have joined forces with the willfully ignorant. Together, they've launched a rebranding campaign in support of suspicious thinking and malicious whistling, although they claim they are just helping young people study the inhumanities. Is this something anyone can do? I wish I had the answers. A hamburger here, a hamburger there; pretty soon it begins to add up.

What are Friends For?

Those surly gargoyles, their colors are tone deaf. Even if they clean up the space junk, it's probably just a plot device. The globe's richest 1% own half the world's wealth. I guess they have to pay attention to something? Have you noticed that my hair's on fire? Sure, I believe fantastic things, but so do you. When I get up tomorrow, I'm going to slip into my flesh bodysuit and listen to some righteous snake music. No, I'm not too worried about death, I'm water proof. Hope it's quick and happens to somebody else, though. Hey, I just forgot everything I said. Pretty sure it wasn't profane and I was using my best church voice. By the way, if I need any help inciting tomorrow's riot, I've got your number. I'll give you a call.

Big Mistake

I don't care what the advertisements say, I haven't made a dime from my money farm. I'd like to make just a little extra, you know, just enough so I can pass the buck. Death may be the measure of all things, but its air quality is neither fish nor foul. As cool and beautiful as I've become since high school, maybe it's finally time to rethink Strunk and White? Sure, I have a brain that's the shape of my head, but whenever my dreams apologize to themselves, I forget I'm in hiding. Of course, it's really none of my business. Have you noticed that the food on this spaceship isn't very good? I find that it goes in one side of my head and out the other. I guess even when it's all or nothing, everything requires a little give and take. No, I've never pulled this red lever before. It looks kind of angry, doesn't it? Maybe, if I just give it a little tug?

Everything You Do is Pretty Grand

I had a few words with the flowers, and they told me they hate their Latin names. Sure, I enjoy mingling with le beau monde, but by the time you read this, everything will be so expensive, there'll be no use jumping to conclusions. Don't worry, there are solutions. The vegetables have already converted to vegetarianism—those cannibals. All I want is money and soup, just the fruits of my labor. By contrast, what is the purpose of the moon? I've been as quiet as I can about the sexual connotations. Now, the point is moot, unless you game the system. Louie says, *Don't slurp your eyeball soup, Dupre. What's the point of stepping on your own toes?* There are 206 bones in the human body, and I've broken them all. I'm pretty sure that got the attention of the trees.

One Reason for the French Revolution

The Miami real estate market is so hot, it's melting the north Pole. Naturally, you can't tell who's innocent and who's guilty just by looking at a courthouse. My doctor says I'm not taking enough drugs, but I told him that in a flight simulator, a bird doesn't need any wings. Luckily, after my last bank job, I had enough money left over to have my fortune read by Madame Pomade. She took one look at my greasy lifeline and said that if I eat my Spumoni upside down, it won't have any calories. Hey, it's Paris fashion week, again. Yeah, I know what you mean. Don't you just love the emperor's new outfit? I'm telling you, that guy dresses sharper than a guillotine. Some people say he's not wearing much, but in my opinion, he's always dressed to kill.

Curious

Once I nearly fell off Riley's houseboat and drowned. Now, I'm going to get my pants altered. Took the muscle relaxant. It's nearly noon, but my hands are still near my fingertips. They say I'm adjusted, but not well-adjusted. Sometimes my skin melts off my face. Last night the sky gave me the silent treatment, but if you're like me, you always keep a bag packed, under the bed. You never know. Driving out on Tunnel Road, usually I don't miss myself until it's too late. Riley was like that, too. I loved him like a brother. It happened on Good Friday. I don't trust the county sheriff's office. That's why I asked the judge, *Was he found hanged or did he commit suicide?* What was Riley even doing in jail, anyway? That's what I'd like to know.

Sink or Swim

At the office, last week, without a warning, they gave me truth serum. Now, it seems everywhere I go: Styrofoam. Every damn thing floats, even my arms and legs. I can't tell if I'm hard wired or battery powered? It's like a light-headed riot. Even the astronauts are partying. Yesterday, when I took off my shoes and threw them into the pool, Sophia said it's my own fault. She said I need more promptitude, that I should comb my hair and stop looking so giddy, or everything I say might be used against me. Of course, everyone looks guilty by 5:00 PM. For example, snakes are some of the most secretive vertebrates out there. They're not stealthy predators, they're just looking for a meal. Eat or be eaten. Like my daddy used to say, *No use building a fence around it. If it's a pool, sooner or later, somebody's bound to drown.*

In Over My Head

I made the strongest case I could make against cannibalism. I had the perfect summer wardrobe. I may have missed out on the extra credit points, but most people lie for a good reason. Bunny tells me that Champaign sales are down this year, because everyone is sad. I've been best man at three of her weddings. She's an identical twin who was separated at birth. Everything changes with time, but I don't care how much you slither, you never entirely shed your skin. Since I dropped out the 12-step program, I've been tormented by the metric system. Sooner or later, it's a matter of time. Before that, it's a question of horsepower. Why is quicksand so slow? Like a head-on collision, a meteor burns toward the thirsty mouth of the lake. I wish I had time to live one more life. I graduated from the School of the Holy Flood. The water there taught me a lesson I'll never forget.

Relax

The sign in the window says *Ladies dresses 70% off*. Can't be sure whether that's an invitation or a warning. Like God, the cause of the incident is still under investigation.

Stop me if you've heard this story so many times, you can't remember what it's about. Administratively speaking, you'd do the same, if I were in your shoes. With the deluxe nightmare, it comes at no extra cost, excluding normal wear and tear.

I may look like I'm hiding in a drowning, but I've learned you can have an excellent memory, if you don't spend all your time trying to forget. It's as easy as an electrocution in standing water.

It's such a beautiful evening tonight, don't you think? The breeze, cool and slow, your eyes, dark dead stars. With my hand in yours, I feel relaxed as an ax lounging in blue sequined moonlight. The throat of the moon pulled out like a drawer.

About the writer:

Brad Rose is the author three collections of poetry and flash fiction, *Pink X-Ray* (Big Table Publishing, 2015), *de/tonations*, (Nixes Mate Press, 2020), and *Momentary Turbulence* (Cervena Barva Press, 2020).

Two new books of prose poems, *WordinEdgeWise* from Cervena Barva Press and *No. Wait. I Can Explain.* from Pelekinesis Press, are forthcoming in 2022. Rose's poetry has recently appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, *O:J&L*, *Into the Void*, *Cloud Bank*, *Abandon Journal*, and *Feral*.

Brad Rose details:

A complete list of publications is available at: <http://bradrosepoetry.com/2019/03/a-list-of-publications/>
His website is: www.bradrosepoetry.com Selected readings can be heard at <http://bradrosepoetry.com/audio-readings/>

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