

Fear in a Handful of Dust / National Poetry Month 2015 30 Poems

by Gary Hardaway

01/ Denouement

My mother was gone
long before the body quit.

Mourning was difficult
across the vacant years.

So much good should have
a tightly focused end;

it ought to end with more
intensity and grief.

No one has the right
to script how someone dies.

02/ Something Like the Promise of a Better Life

Unhappy people buy everything
they can afford-- and then some,
going deeper into debt to own the next
super quick, super powerful phone, the next

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brilliantly connective app, the next elegant and coveted
small appliance that promises to bridge the abyss surrounding them
that keeps them from reaching the obviously lush
other side. Unhappiness is a necessary boon
to a global economy that accelerates
towards something like the
promise of a better life.

03/ Crumbling Stones Crush Our Self Esteem

They terrify-- each wrinkle, jowl, bald spot,
potbelly, and curved spine,
as our rock and rollers age ungracefully
in web-enabled public view.

Jimi and Janis remain fierce and beautiful
but Brian looks like a bloated corpse
and Jagger struts, a shrunken cadaver,
twitched in time by amped electrodes.

04/ Aesthetic Strategy

If you slice despair in samples thin enough
it acquires a fine translucence

and can be framed in multiple views
beautiful as pictures at an exhibition-

a one-man show, elegant as paintings
by a famed reductivist treasured for restraint.

05/ Art exploits

the thrill and terror
of consciousness and the senses
in order to dispel the boredom
between adventures. Against

the mysteries and the dark
it illuminates and shapes
the memory of what has been
in patterns and pictures

of what might have been. Art
is also happy trees and accidents
turned into birds. It is
a celebration and an exorcism.

06/ Quantum Mechanics

It isn't what you see sometimes
but how and when. We love things

either/or and miss the curves
time throws at us and only see

the pitcher or the pitch.
It's semiology writ small.

Writ very small; and useless in
designing bridges

but generates a lot of talk
at bars and small symposia.

It seems a little solipsistic

but may indeed be evidence of God

given its mystery and caprice.
We drown in our entanglements.

07/ Threshold

For a brief time—an ice age,
a set or two of plague years—
the earth was almost rid of us.

But we proliferated back
and swelled like a deadly virus
in the blood and organs of the world

until, by sheer mass, we poisoned
what we need and soon-- none too soon--
the earth will finally be rid of us.

08/ Why I Write- Item Seventeen

Whenever I catalog
the intelligence and wisdom
of each acquaintance and friend,
I feel I am, in fact,
the dimmest and least wise
man on earth. Then, I begin
to write again and all my
cleverness and insight return.

09/ Experimental Poetry

Every poem experiments—
attempting tessellation of nouns and verbs
from sedimentary language
in a search for something
crystalline and faceted

that might refract the given light
in rainbows of colors
hidden in the ordinary day.
It's possible but not routine.
Sometimes the dirt just stays dirt

and will not shine or even form
an ashtray regardless of the ways
one wets and blends and frantically
rearranges dull, recalcitrant particles.
The sad brick crumbles as it dries.

10/ Despite the Spring

and the blue abundance
of sky and bluebonnets photographed
and shared along the interwebs

and that vibrant pitch of green
the young Shumard leaves
throw to any eyes that catch it

and the sway of heavy yellow daffodils
and bird chirps and mad dash of squirrels
across streets pursuing mates

and the thick crust of dew-infused
pollen across windshields

and the cheerful sniffles and sneezes

he remains resolute in his misanthropy
inspired by recurrent disappointment.
The scarred heart pumps its viscous blood

11/ Wonder as the Sum of All My Ignorance

Closely observed, a trip from
corner to corner of our

not quite quarter acre
lot in life would be a

sequence full of awe in the
face of all I can't begin to know.

What insect is that? What
flowering weed does it climb?

Is it a productive year for the Pecan?
Will the St. Augustine

ever send runners out
to cover that dusty wound in the yard?

Questions unanswered proliferate
across the April sky, blue

with wisps of cumulus white.
The Boeing begins its slow descent

southwest towards the grimy
regional hub. The engines slow.

I am so ignorant, each
molecule is cause of wonder

and more wonderful, too, because
invisible to the un-augmented eye.

12/ Be Afraid

Everything conspires to kill you:
water (the river, the sea, the flood)
air (the hurricane, the blizzard wind, the twisting tornado)
fire (the burning house, the burning forest, the burning sun)
earth (the landslide, the earthquake, the pull of gravity)
and animals, large and small (the bear, the spider, the snake)

It makes you weary and wary
especially since the greatest danger
is your kind, your very own kind
(the sword, the arrows, the noose).

13/ Birding

Chimney swifts and sparrows,
pigeons, doves, alarming grackles
and murders of crows--
but hardly ever cardinals and jays,
or robins, red and gray.
Even mockingbirds are scarce;
the rat-a-tat tap of woodpeckers
startles in its rarity,
and I haven't seen
a scissortail in twenty years.

14/ Portrait without Birds

He has that Hitchcock body--
a badly stuffed sausage,
bulging halfway down
and spindly above and below—
so Tippi has no interest
until he can make her a star.

15/ Republican Presidential Candidates Haiku

If they were drowning,
I would stop, watch, and applaud
the water's wisdom.

16/ Remedy

Consider suicide--
the last, best

analgesic--
guaranteed

to stop that nagging pain
and any others

that might have nagged
hereafter.

The side effects include
a loss of hearing,

loss of sight,
loss of taste and touch

and smell--
so use responsibly.

17/ After Appomattox

The Confederates should have hung
from trees and gallows throughout the south
to celebrate the spring of 1865.
The renegade states- Virginia, Georgia,
Texas, and the rest- should have lost their names
and been reconstrued as fresh new territories.
The lands the hung once held by deed
should have been reclaimed as public lands
and granted to the aboriginals and slaves
the worst of the Dutch and English deprived
of land and liberty. As a son of the south,
I would never have been born- a small
price to pay in order not to suffer
an endless loathing of personal history.

18/ Duration and Frequency

Where I'm going, you can't follow.
Where you're going, I can't follow

through the veil
that transforms living energy
into other energies, living and not.

Through the veil--
beyond which spirits
and demons may await

to caress what I was,
to fondle or lash what I was.

Or, beyond which, nothing
may await to touch
what we were in any way

for spirits and demons have no life
but what imagination gives
and, past the veil,

imagination dissipates like music
in the concert hall, the concert done.

19/ Lapses

Sometimes one must scratch the scrotum
or left cheek of the derriere. Or sneeze
expelling what offends. The small
indignities of enculturation abound.

One survives to discretely adjust
the fit of underwear or excuse
oneself to the powder room
to pass the gas of a hostess's dinner.

The body does what a body must
hoping in its trained way
to always do so out of sight
and out of hearing.

20/ Yes, the End Time Is Near

It is sad and tragic
to be wiped out by cataclysm:

lava, ash, tsunami,
pyroclastic flow,

trembling and shaking ground,
wailing winds and inescapable

waves of water.
We'll just choke on all our shit

or drop dead breathing
our own exhaust

for we are a small and
numerously stupid people.

21/ Not by Choice but Circumstance

I haven't overcome the anger yet
at having lost the amniotic comfort
and constraint of not yet being thrust
into the glaring world

with its burdens of instinct-
all that chemical desire-
and consciousness- all that
placement of the self

within the overwhelming awe
and terror that is this space and time-
and the not quite unbearable beauties,
sensible and imagined.

With small and fleshy hands
I scratch at enigmatic stones,
shred the soft pulp of fingertips,
and split the more incisive nails

striving to impose or discern
a pattern that includes me.
The body is a fragile dwelling place
and ill equipped to understand.

22/ Chapel of a Latter Day Agoraphobic

I no longer want to be
in the thrum and thrust of things.
I want to be left alone

with my crisp white box wine
and the news of our sadness and decline
The thrum and the thrust

have beaten conviviality out of me.
Leave me alone to parse the sad news
and write of my own bruises.

23/ Tuesday

In hushed tones, we speak the unspeakable:
his one son, his only child,

dead suddenly at seventeen.

Only last Friday, he was introduced
around, smiling, healthy,
a fine young man.

The family loved guns.
He could strip and clean the rifle in minutes.
A closed casket service, Friday at two.

24/ Selfie

What do I have
but inherited patterns
of an ambiguous language,
a few numbers
and a handful of their operations,
the enchantments
of music and paintings,
and a legacy of architecture
that decays before my eyes?

Besides a sliver of slivered time
and a fleshy sack of chemicals,
what am I but the sum of old ideas
and the way I play
at rearranging them?

25/ Hive

Do the bees of the hive love one another?
Each brief life is lived in dedication

to the honeyed buzz of the colony,
hexangular cells of the nursery.

They don't love bees of other hives
and certainly not intrusive human hands

which bring the sting of suicide bombers
dying for the queen and waxwork city-state.

26/ Briefing

Petty minds think arithmetic thoughts
in units of dollars and cents

and strive to quantify the world
in spread sheets, plus and minus,

projected on the wall in power points
with charts, barred and pied,

in 2D surfaces, blue, red, and white.
The curvature of light

through gravity's lenses
cannot be computed by

their bars and pies and thus
must be of no importance.

27/ Of Roses and Hyacinths

The blooms are practical
and cannot see themselves

as beautiful or smell
themselves as fragrant.

Beauty is an imposition
draped across the parts we sense

(with limiting apparatus) of all
the worlds that spread, oblivious.

28/ Suicide Consulting Hotline

We exist to facilitate
successful conclusions of hopeless lives.
It's what we're here for.

Our goal is to achieve
efficient resolution
of every sad and useless human life

until we can cease operations
and advise ourselves
regarding a proper exit strategy.

29/ Intelligent Design

Posit butterflies
as evidence of heavenly design.
I will show you
caterpillars eating Ms. Montgomery's

cherished rose bush.
The worlds are full of predators

hungry for the loved flesh.
We have a Heisenbergian reality:

Everything depends upon
the where and when of circumstance,
the cropped point in the spinning
newsreel of your experience.

I'll tell you what you know:
You don't know shit
until you're buried
up to your nose in it.

30/ Huddled

The nearsighted world
puts on its lenses

and suddenly sees
beyond its own
little neighborhood

to realize how small
the old familiar really is.

The terrible beauties
stretch beyond
the dwarfed imagination.

