

What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List

by

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Sailing

A dead roach floats on the surface
of my mother's afternoon coffee.
She watches its compatriots
scale the wall above the stove
as if they know she cannot
douse them with Raid
while dinner is cooking.
She doesn't know if roaches laugh,
but she imagines they do on days like this
when all the scrubbing in the world

seems to be for naught.
She dumps the coffee down the drain
and wipes her hands
on the green housecoat she wears
to hang out the window
clipping freshly laundered sheets to the clothesline,
watching them snap and billow in the wind
like the graceful sails of a schooner
she wishes she could board with her children
and sail away to someplace clean.

Field Notes: Hand

Subject studied
in natural habitat:

It chops the onions
for tonight's chili.
Observe the way the fingers
curl around the knife handle
making smooth vertical cuts
that release the gases
that burn the eyes
and summon the tears.

Watch it clip the leash
to the dog's collar,
and coil the long strap
twice around the wrist
to keep a firm hold
in case he decides to chase
the neighbor's cat.

Study the way it handles
the steering wheel,
the subtle movements
that keep the car centered in the lane,
the easy flick of the index finger
turning the blinker on,
the smooth return to the wheel.

Observe it like a scientist
on a field expedition studying
the behavior of a moth—
so common a thing
until you try to count its wingbeats
or describe its flight pattern.

And then a meat cleaver
falls from the sky.

Let Morning Come

after Jane Kenyon's "Let Evening Come"

Let the darkness of the long night
recede from the city's rooftops, blending
morning with mourning as the sun rises.

Let the taxis barrel down the streets
as if there were somewhere to go beyond
this hospital room. Let morning come.

Let the unopened envelopes pile up
in the mailbox. Let sunlight pour into
your kitchen where dishes still litter the sink.

Let pictures in their frames recall happier days.
Let the neighbors wonder about the woman
taken away in an ambulance. Let mourning come.

To the milk carton in the refrigerator, to the blinking
light on the answering machine, to the ones
left behind, let morning come.

Let cold wind blow, as it will, and don't
be afraid. Grief is the outer fabric of a coat
lined with gratitude, so let mourning come.

Rescue at Koko Crater

He descended like a spider from a slender thread.
The chopper blades whirred above the trail.
“Don’t be afraid,” said his partner.
From the top of the volcano, I could see
a crowd in the parking lot below.

“Don’t be afraid,” they said,
snapping me into a canvas harness,
“He’s the best in the business,” said one firefighter.
“I’d let him carry my mother,” said his partner.

He hooked my harness to his belt with a steel carabiner.
“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “We lift cars with these things.”
If I could have moved the muscles of my face,
I might have smiled.

He signaled the pilot and we rose in sudden whoosh,
dust and stones swirling in the vortex.
His body was taut as the cable that carried us.
“Don’t be afraid,” he said.
“Thirty seconds and we’ll be back on the ground.”

We glided over the turquoise face of Hanauma Bay,
its half-moon coastline fringed with palm trees.
“You might as well open your eyes,” he said.
“Tourists can’t buy a view like this.”
So I looked, and I wasn’t afraid.