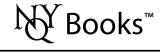
What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List

by

Gloria Heffernan



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Contents

Some of Our Parts	13
Rotunda	14
She Weeps for Camelot	16
Sailing	17
Astronomy	18
The Girls of Paris	19
All Through the Night	21
Double Exposure	23
Evening in Paris	25
Scent Memory	26
Cursive	29
Taking Her Vitals	30
Kaddish for My Sister	31
My Sister's Glasses	32
Sniper Fire	33
Not Your Average Garage Sale	34
Reading a Life	35
A Greening of Sorts	37
Pearl	39
Shrapnel	40
Field Notes: Hand	41
Let Morning Come	43
The Family We Choose	44
Prayer of Lamentation and Remembrance	45
Tinnitus, 3:00 a.m.	46

Insomnia	47
The Insomniac's Dream Journal	48
What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List	49
Mass of Remembrance	51
Love Letter to Tomorrow	53
Bumper Sticker Theology on Route 690	55
Hiking Koko	57
Rescue at Koko Crater	59
Paradise Found	60
Emergence	61
The Gardens at Villa Lecchi	62
At the Gutenberg Museum	63
Red Carpet	65
Sipping Tea in the Dalai Lama's Chair	67
The Dry Cleaner's Daughter	68
Praise Song for the Hospice Nurse	71
Ten Rings	73
Making Music	75
Love in the Aviary	77
What I Want	78
The Green Room	80
Retriever	
Ginger Teaches Me How to Die	83
The Prodigal's Sister	84
Martha and the Prodigal's Brother	86

The Prodigal Son's Father Attends His First Al-Anon Meeting_	89
The Zen of Nap Time	90
Cloud Watching with Daniel	91
Souvenir	92
The Day Before DoomsdayAgain	93
Snowy Egret—Avery Island, Louisiana	94
The Wild Boars of Fukushima	95
Celtic Wind	97
Watching Billy Collins Read His Poems	98
Breakfast Bearing the Name of the Poet Into Heaven	100
Dear Mary Oliver,	101
Waiting for the Tulips to Bloom	102
Submission	103
Wisdom Quilt	104
Afterword	107

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.