

# Elizabeth Bishop

*Selected poems*

## One art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster,

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

- Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

# Questions Of Travel

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams hurry too rapidly down to the sea, and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion, turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

- For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains, aren't waterfalls yet, in a quick age or so, as ages go here, they probably will be.

But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling, the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships, slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?

Where should we be today?

Is it right to be watching strangers in a play in this strangest of theatres?

What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life in our bodies, we are determined to rush to see the sun the other way around?

The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?

To stare at some inexplicable old stonework, inexplicable and impenetrable,

at any view,

instantly seen and always, always delightful?

Oh, must we dream our dreams

and have them, too? And have we room

for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity

not to have seen the trees along this road,

really exaggerated in their beauty,

not to have seen them gesturing

like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.

- Not to have had to stop for gas and heard  
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune  
of disparate wooden clogs  
carelessly clacking over  
a grease-stained filling-station floor.  
(In another country the clogs would all be tested.  
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)

- A pity not to have heard  
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird  
who sings above the broken gasoline pump  
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:  
three towers, five silver crosses.

- Yes, a pity not to have pondered,  
blurr'dly and inconclusively,  
on what connection can exist for centuries  
between the crudest wooden footwear  
and, careful and finicky,  
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages

- Never to have studied history in  
the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.

- And never to have had to listen to rain  
so much like politicians' speeches:  
two hours of unrelenting oratory  
and then a sudden golden silence  
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

'Is it lack of imagination that makes us come  
to imagined places, not just stay at home?  
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right  
about just sitting quietly in one's room?

Continent, city, country, society:  
the choice is never wide and never free.  
And here, or there... No. Should we have stayed at home,  
wherever that may be?

# Anaphora

Each day with so much ceremony  
begins, with birds, with bells,  
with whistles from a factory;  
such white-gold skies our eyes  
first open on, such brilliant walls  
that for a moment we wonder  
'Where is the music coming from, the energy?  
The day was meant for what ineffable creature  
we must have missed?' Oh promptly he  
appears and takes his earthly nature  
instantly, instantly falls  
victim of long intrigue,  
assuming memory and mortal  
mortal fatigue.

More slowly falling into sight  
and showering into stippled faces,  
darkening, condensing all his light;  
in spite of all the dreaming  
squandered upon him with that look,  
suffers our uses and abuses,  
sinks through the drift of bodies,  
sinks through the drift of classes  
to evening to the beggar in the park  
who, weary, without lamp or book  
prepares stupendous studies:  
the fiery event  
of every day in endless  
endless assent.