

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.

--Elizabeth Bishop



Lose /lu:z/ *verb* (lost, lost) : ~ sth/sb to be unable to find

I've lost my key.

She lost her husband in the crowd.

Loser /lu: 'zə/ *noun* a person who is regularly unsuccessful, especially when you have a low opinion of them.

He's a born loser.

Loss /lɒs/ *noun*: no longer having sth or as much of sth.

I want to report the loss of my package.

Lost /lɒst/ *adj.* if something is lost, you cannot find it.

The keys are lost somewhere in the house.

The art of losing isn't hard to master;

so many things seem filled with the **intent** (= emphasizing that the loss of many things is a natural part of life.)

to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

The speaker chooses to turn the idea of loss into an art form and tries to convince the reader (and herself) that certain things inherently want to be lost and that, when they do get lost, it's nothing to cry about because it was bound to happen in the first place. This is a fateful approach, gracefully accepted by the speaker.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster (=agitated: showing in your behaviour that you are nervous.)
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn't hard to master.

The speaker is suggesting that things, keys, and even time are capable of being lost, absent from your life for no other reason other than they are.

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

Now the reader is being told to consciously lose something, to practice the art; places and names, perhaps on a personal map. Time is being squeezed too as life gets busier and our minds become full and stretched. But in the end we can handle the losses, no problem.

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.

Again, the emphasis is on time, specifically family time, with the mother's watch being lost, surely symbolic of a profound personal experience for the poet. And note that the speaker is in the here and now when the words And look! appear in the first line, telling the reader that three loved houses went. Went where? We're not sure, we only know they were definitely lost.

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.

Emotional tension is still not apparent as the reader is now confronted with the speaker's loss of not only the cities where they used to live but the whole continent. This seems drastic. To go from a set of house keys to a continent is absurd - how much more can the speaker endure? Disaster still hasn't happened, but she misses what she had and possibly took for granted.

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.

Use of adverbs, even and too in connection with a loved one, reveals something quite painfully. The personal gives way to the impersonal, the form dictating, despite the last attempt (Write it!).

Take sth in your stride (IDM): to accept and deal with sth difficult without letting it worry you too much.

I told her what had happened and she took it all in her stride.

Hindsight (noun) [U]: the understanding that you have of a situation only after it has happened and that means you would have done things in a different way.

It is easy to criticize with the benefit of hindsight.

Take sb/sth for granted (IDM) : to be so used to sb/sth that you do not recognize their true value any more and do not show that you are grateful.

Her husband was always there and she just took him for granted.

Impersonal (adj.): (usually disapproving) lacking friendly human feeling.

I find the atmosphere there rather impersonal.

Stave sth off (PHR V) : to prevent sth bad from affecting you.

We were hoping to stave off these difficult decisions until September.

LINKS:

[Elizabeth Bishop | Poetry Foundation](#)

[One Art by Elizabeth Bishop | Poem Analysis](#)

[One Art Poem Summary and Analysis | LitCharts](#)

[Analysis of Poem "One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop - Owlcation - Education](#)

[One Art Summary | Shmoop](#)