Breakage

BY MARY OLIVER

I go down to the edge of the sea.

How everything shines in the morning light!

The cusp of the whelk,
the broken cupboard of the clam,
the opened, blue mussels,
moon snails, pale pink and barnacle scarred—
and nothing at all whole or shut, but tattered, split,
dropped by the gulls onto the gray rocks and all the moisture gone.
It's like a schoolhouse
of little words,
thousands of words.
First you figure out what each one means by itself,
the jingle, the periwinkle, the scallop
full of moonlight.

Then you begin, slowly, to read the whole story.

The Season of Phantasmal Peace

Then all the nations of birds lifted together the huge net of the shadows of this earth in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues, stitching and crossing it. They lifted up the shadows of long pines down trackless slopes, the shadows of glass-faced towers down evening streets, the shadow of a frail plant on a city sill—the net rising soundless as night, the birds' cries soundless, until there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or weather, only this passage of phantasmal light that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever.

And men could not see, looking up, what the wild geese drew, what the ospreys trailed behind them in silvery ropes that flashed in the icy sunlight; they could not hear battalions of starlings waging peaceful cries, bearing the net higher, covering this world like the vines of an orchard, or a mother drawing the trembling gauze over the trembling eyes of a child fluttering to sleep;

it was the light that you will see at evening on the side of a hill in yellow October, and no one hearing knew what change had brought into the raven's cawing, the killdeer's screech, the ember-circling chough such an immense, soundless, and high concern for the fields and cities where the birds belong, except it was their seasonal passing, Love, made seasonless, or, from the high privilege of their birth, something brighter than pity for the wingless ones below them who shared dark holes in windows and in houses, and higher they lifted the net with soundless voices above all change, betrayals of falling suns, and this season lasted one moment, like the pause between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace, but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long.

Lot's Wife

BY ANNA AKHMATOVA (Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward, trans.)

And the just man trailed God's shining agent, over a black mountain, in his giant track, while a restless voice kept harrying his woman: "It's not too late, you can still look back

at the red towers of your native Sodom, the square where once you sang, the spinning-shed, at the empty windows set in the tall house where sons and daughters blessed your marriage-bed."

A single glance: a sudden dart of pain stitching her eyes before she made a sound . . . Her body flaked into transparent salt, and her swift legs rooted to the ground.

Who will grieve for this woman? Does she not seem too insignificant for our concern? Yet in my heart I never will deny her, who suffered death because she chose to turn.

"Lana Turner has collapsed!"

Lana Turner has collapsed! I was trotting along and suddenly it started raining and snowing and you said it was hailing but hailing hits you on the head hard so it was really snowing and raining and I was in such a hurry to meet you but the traffic was acting exactly like the sky and suddenly I see a headline lana turner has collapsed! there is no snow in Hollywood there is no rain in California I have been to lots of parties and acted perfectly disgraceful but I never actually collapsed oh Lana Turner we love you get up

Over and Over Stitch

BY JORIE GRAHAM

Late in the season the world digs in, the fat blossoms hold still for just a moment longer.

Nothing looks satisfied,
but there is no real reason to move on much further: this isn't a bad place;
why not pretend

we wished for it?
The bushes have learned to live with their haunches.
The hydrangea is resigned
to its pale and inconclusive utterances.
Towards the end of the season
it is not bad

to have the body. To have experienced joy as the mere lifting of hunger is not to have known it less. The tobacco leaves don't mind being removed to the long racks—all uses are astounding

to the used.

There are moments in our lives which, threaded, give us heaven—noon, for instance, or all the single victories of gravity, or the kudzu vine, most delicate of manias, which has pressed its luck

this far this season. It shines a gloating green. Its edges darken with impatience, a kind of wind. Nothing again will ever be this easy, lives being snatched up like dropped stitches, the dry stalks of daylilies marking a stillness we can't keep.

[love is more thicker than forget]

BY E. E. CUMMINGS

love is more thicker than forget more thinner than recall more seldom than a wave is wet more frequent than to fail

it is most mad and moonly and less it shall unbe than all the sea which only is deeper than the sea

love is less always than to win less never than alive less bigger than the least begin less littler than forgive

it is most sane and sunly and more it cannot die than all the sky which only is higher than the sky

One Art

BY ELIZABETH BISHOP

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.

paraphrase BY ARTHUR YAP

when one wonders how to begin to talk about something, the word swallows the world. the word comes close to carrying its own ontology, its own reward for being: all the way to hakone words were hung on every tree. the most striking, startingly orange, tuned by the breeze. words, maple leaves. words were brown moss, mellow sunlight with soft hair.

words were on the lake; sea-mews spanning circles, white on white foam of the boat's wake. a translucent mist held the banks in check. then, a sudden reined splash of muted colour, a shape proffered itself. the image beckoned the eye, a word whispered itself: it's a blue moored boat, a clump of willows. words were a crocodile of schoolboys jostling & laughing on the deck.

the lake was a sheet of glass; everything a smaller mirror beneath. on the surface, a catamaran floated us, words, all the way to hakone, words were.