

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.

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!”

BY FRANK O'HARA

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 unbecome
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 hakōne
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 hakōne, words were.