

Two Monks

Two monks on a pilgrimage came to the ford of a river. There they saw a girl dressed in all her finery, obviously not knowing what to do since the river was high and she did not want to spoil her clothes. Without much ado, one of the monks took her on his back, carried her across and put her down on dry ground on the other side.

Then the monks continued on their way. But the other monk after an hour started complaining, "Surely it is not right to touch a woman; it is against the commandments to have close contact with women. How could you go against the rules of monks?"

The monk who had carried the girl walked along silently, but finally he remarked, "I set her down by the river an hour ago, why are you still carrying her?"

By Irmgard Schloegl
The Wisdom of Zen Masters
(New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1975)

Writing Prompt

Journal, Part 1: What is it you are still carrying that you now know you need let go of? What are the benefits to you still carrying it? What do you fear most about letting it go? How will your life change? What do you feel you need in order to let go?

Journal, Part 2: Write as if you have already let it go. How do you feel? Who says what to you and how do you respond? What are you doing now that you have let it go?

Send this to me either as a journal entry or convert it into a fictional prose piece.

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

Writing Prompt (optional)

Write a poem honoring that which you feel you must lose in order to make room for what it is you most desire. Maybe add your own twist to why “The art of losing isn’t hard to master,” if you believe that to be true.