

## Variations on a Theme by Elizabeth Bishop

by John Murillo

Start with loss. Lose everything. Then lose it all again.  
Lose a good woman on a bad day. Find a better woman,  
then lose five friends chasing her. Learn to lose as if  
your life depended on it. Learn that your life depends on it.  
Learn it like karate, like riding a bike. *Learn it, master it.*  
Lose money, lose time, lose your natural mind.  
Get left behind, then learn to leave others. Lose and  
lose again. Measure a father's coffin against a cousin's  
crashing T-cells. Kiss your sister through prison glass.  
Know why your woman's not answering her phone.  
Lose sleep. Lose religion. Lose your wallet in El Segundo.  
Open your window. Listen: the last slow notes  
of a Donny Hathaway song. A child crying. Listen:  
a drunk man is cussing out the moon. He sounds like  
your dead uncle, who, before he left, lost a leg  
to sugar. Shame. Learn what's given can be taken;  
what can be taken, will. This you can bet on without  
losing. Sure as nightfall and an empty bed. Lose  
and lose again. Lose until it's second nature. *Losing  
farther, losing faster.* Lean out your open window, listen:  
the child is laughing now. No, it's the drunk man again  
in the street, losing his voice, suffering each invisible star.