

What do I most want to say? I think that you must have no regrets in my behalf. I have had a rich life, full of rewards and satisfactions that come to few, and if it must end now, I can feel that I have achieved most of what I wished to do. That wouldn't have been true two years ago, when I first realized my time was short, and I am so grateful to have had this extra time.

My regrets, darling, are for your sadness, for leaving Roger, when I so wanted to see him through to manhood, for dear Jeffie whose life is linked to mine.

Perhaps there is more time than I think. But for the past year I have been able to feel much less optimism. And now this new development! But as to the angina, in a way it is almost like a secret weapon against the grimmer foe—so if it should take me quickly, darling, remember this is the easier way for me.

But enough of that. What I want to write of is the joy and fun and gladness we have shared—for these are the things I want you to remember—I want to live on in your memories of happiness. I shall write more of those things. But tonight I'm weary and must put out the light. Meanwhile, there is this word—and my love that will always live.

Rachel

Elizabeth Bishop to U. T. and Joseph Summers

"When you write my epitaph," Elizabeth Bishop told fellow poet Robert Lowell in 1948, "you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived." Loss had been a constant for Bishop; at the age of eight months her father died suddenly, and her mother was so traumatized by the event she had to be institutionalized. At the age of five Bishop was taken to live with her grandparents, and she never saw her mother again. After years of heart-break and dejection, she finally found love and stability in her relationship with a Brazilian woman named Lota Macedo Soares. Bishop and Lota were together for fifteen years until Lota died on September 25, 1967—the aftermath of an intentional, early-morning overdose of sedatives on September 17. Three days after Lota's death, Bishop wrote the following letter to her close friends, U. T. and Joseph Summers.

September 28, 1967

Lota died Monday morning without having regained consciousness. That's about all I have to tell you now—Tuesday was taken up with all the arrangements necessary for sending a "body" (oh god) home to a foreign country—very complicated—and now I have just talked, forever, it seems to the Brazilian Consul here (very nice, although I don't know him—he seems to have known Lota)—about what to say for the newspapers, etc. This is all a great waste of time because I gather it was in them already and god knows what they said. However, we did our best and it may help some . . .

She was a wonderful, remarkable woman and I'm sorry you didn't know her better. I had the 12 or 13 happiest years of my life with her, before she got sick—and I suppose that is a great deal in this unmerciful world.

I just want to repeat (maybe) I was with her for only a few hours, actually, and there was no quarrel or discussion of any sort. I know of N.Y. gossip already so am dreading all this kind of interpretation. In fact her letters had been full of plans for our future together—although knowing her so well, I could see she was still very sick and trying to force herself to sound that way. Oh WHY WHY WHY didn't she wait a few days? Why did I sleep so soundly—why why why—I can't help thinking I might have saved her somehow—go over and over that Sunday afternoon but honestly can't think of anything I did especially wrong—except that I have done many wrong things all my life. Please try to keep on loving me in spite of them, won't you? I am clinging to my friends desperately.

I wanted to go down with her but the doctor persuaded me not to—the Macedo Soares clan is very big and very famous—and I'd just be in the way. I shall have to go as soon as I feel a little better, of course—but I'll keep in touch with you . . .