Broken Prepositional Phrases

There is a class of action verbs that are frequently followed by prepositions that form a unified whole with the verb. The noun or pronoun that follows is the recipient (in other words, it is the direct object). *Most verbs do not function this way, but some do.* Here is the verb first in the active voice, then in the passive forms:

**ACTIVE.** I prepared for any emergency  
**PASSIVE.** Any emergency was prepared for  
**PASSIVE.** Any emergency was prepared for by me

**ACTIVE.** They laughed at us  
**PASSIVE.** We were laughed at  
**PASSIVE.** We were laughed at by them

**ACTIVE.** They will call on you  
**PASSIVE.** You will be called on  
**PASSIVE.** You will be called on by them

**ACTIVE.** They spoke to me  
**PASSIVE.** I was spoken to  
**PASSIVE.** I was spoken to by them

**ACTIVE.** They listened to him  
**PASSIVE.** He was listened to  
**PASSIVE.** He was listened to by them

**ACTIVE.** They looked at us  
**PASSIVE.** We were looked at  
**PASSIVE.** We were looked at by them

When these verbs are changed into the passive voice, the preposition still occupies its position after the passive root. Remember the close relationship between preposition and adverbs; in the passive voice, it is perhaps best to think of these words as adverbs.

Take a second look at the examples in the active voice. Pretty clearly these are prepositional phrases, not simple adverbs with objects. The point is that these prepositional phrases can be broken when the voice of the verb is reversed.