POETRY

Before You Go

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Illustration by Nea Likar

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Sestina

Instructions for traveling to the underworld

you hold a lion
on a leash, you are a dove
a Venus, the morning and evening star
you open your ear to the darkness
leave everything behind
and travel

before you travel,
tell a friend what to do if the lion
will not return, if there is nothing behind
you, no flying dove
only darkness
and the memory of a star

open your ear, don’t look at the stars
and travel
into the darkness
like a lion
without a leash, and a dove
without a cage, leave everything behind

now, as you fall behind
yourself, gate after gate — no stars,
no dove —
continue to travel
without a lion
into the unknown darkness

your sister rules the darkness,
and behind
her there is a dead lion
and an extinct star —
it is the end of your travel,
you have forgotten all about the flying dove

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your friend remembers — there it is, the dove
that appears in your darkness
and as you travel
back, there is nothing behind
you — only the stars
in the shape of a lion.

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