

POETRY

# Before You Go

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Illustration by Nea Likar

*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

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.