

FIVE POEMS

THE LANTERN

A little way ahead
each is alone

when you see it you are there already
in one respect

for in that world nothing can break
so no one believes in the plural there
which is the first abstraction and the last
which is the and which is the between which is the among
so no one believes in us there
so at last there is only
the single
one
alone
held together by nothing
so the question of belief never arises

that is the place of a god
for a god is alone
he sits on each different leaf
he holds in each eye
differently
in each hand differently
one emblem of one aspect of his difference
each time it is single
each time it is an image of him
each time it is an image of you
each time it is an image of no one
carrying a lantern
each time it is different
from a different side
each time it is the same

well once you are there can you speak

if you were going to speak at last
which would you speak to

you open your one mouth
each image opens his mouth

you say nothing
once

you open a cave in the ground
one cave
each god closes each eye
you go down inside each eye
into each vein
into each vein of each leaf
into each root

no root has an eye
it has always been so dark there

but your eye is closed
so it's lighter for you

far away an empty lantern is swinging

Image of no one carrying it
you start to follow it

to see his face

FOREWORD

We will tell no more than a little
about the first wing
the orphan

we will say nothing of his parents the giants
nor of the tree in which he was born
one autumn
nor of his sisters the grass
nor his brothers the fires

he was alone he was the first wing
it is all we need to know
everything here has two wings
except us

all we will tell
is how he found the other wing
his reflection groping downward through the air
and of the stream between them
where it rises
how flight began
why the moths
come and bathe in the dust
and it is a light to them

TO THE HAND

What the eye sees is a dream of sight
what it wakes to
is a dream of sight

and in the dream
for every real lock
there is only one real key
and it's in some other dream
now invisible

it's the key to the one real door
it opens the water and the sky both at once
it's already in the downward river
with my hand on it
my real hand

and I am saying to the hand
turn

open the river

THE CRY

In many houses the cry has a window
and in one house the window is open

and the cry has flowed out like one drop of water
that once filled the whole room

there it is the first drop of water
from which everything came
when it is all over

a single drop of water is flowing
there on the white path into the hills

you would see it was a tear
because it is flowing upward
becoming a note in the still night



"We'll have to keep your car another day. There's a devilled egg in the carburetor."

leaving its salt to the white path
that flows into the place far below
that once was sea

as you would know
if you were to stand in that doorway
if you were to open the door
if you were to find it

of the cry
that no longer sleeps there

so that if you were to see that window
from the outside
you would see nothing

INSTRUCTIONS TO FOUR WALLS

Now one of you turn this way
just as you are
woman and girl all these years
speaking another language
as the earth does
and open your eyes
with the wall inside them
doubled
but going away
getting smaller and smaller
but don't you move
see how long it takes for me to appear there
and how old I am then
and how old I've been
if you can tell

but don't put on anything special for me
I want to see you as you are every day
as you see me
without my name

the one of you whose turn it is
to follow me like a dog
don't be the dog who's stolen something
don't be the dead dog
don't be the lost dog the sick dog
the watch dog
be the good brown dog that ran through both families
till you found me
be happy to see the back of my head
just where it is

and one of you be the sea
starting right there
older than words or water
opening into itself forward and backward
each wave lying still
with a piece of horizon in its arms
one sail going
one sail coming
two wings approaching each other

and one of you
stay still just as you are
with your door
be yesterday
be tomorrow
be today

—W. S. MERWIN