

The Spirit Stays

by James Baker Hall

up the stairs behind a door
the house the whole of it
stays quiet the spirit stays
in the basement
under the orderly boxes
of your father's leavings
or maybe your father
was disorderly

the spirit stays
in the pathstones leading to the garage
and in the grass grown up between them
and in the newspapers
filling the Kroger's sacks
both paper and plastic
waiting to be recycled
the spirit stays
in the dogs sleeping
in the sunlight
on the other side
of the letter box
and in the blue plastic
Herald-Leader tube
across the road
the spirit stays
until it goes it goes
until it comes back
and stays until it goes again
oh where was I all the while
here here and again here
until here is there and elsewhere
now we're getting somewhere
now we're gone already

all the while
the newborn sleeps
until she's a year old
ready to utter her first word
what will it be
what was it for you
you don't remember you say
your parents remember
ask them to tell you
they're dead you say
all the more likely

they'll remember I say
that moment when the spirit
left its hiding place
and took up its next
body the first word
the spirit stayed
and went thus
few are the first words
many are the newborne