Old Language

Dawn Baker Brimley

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Old Language

We canyoned in early, on wheels, 
and now have little time, we think; 
but sandstone pulses red on all sides 
and the town, the business of the town, 
trails off like a lost thought.

Here is a place of memory. 
A small boat streams and arrows us 
in deep where sacred datura seeps 
on the shoulders of the water 
and a salamander like an icon 
bronzes in orange clay, orange light.

At last the boat hushes, slows 
and brushes cathedral walls 
of the Anasazi and the Fremont, 
one of which spirited seven figures 
here, imagined them large, draped 
them sparsely, hammered or blooded 
them into life, floated or angled 
them in mystery.

We have a few hours here. 
Box elder trees tendril the walls, 
hanging like unspoken words; 
an old wind breathes on the water. 
Light flares high on the paintings, 
the sun of another near-nighttime, 
another arrival back and inward 
on the river, in the slickrock, 
in the heart of all that is changed 
but must not change in this land 
that glides us through our deepest dreams.

—Dawn Baker Brimley

Dawn Baker Brimley won second place in the BYU Studies Poetry Contest.