

Cliff Dwellings

Dixie Partridge

Here, rock has a soft face
and wind moves above like spirit.
I listen down the long slant
of switchback trails, steps carved
where red rock accordions through the canyon.

Lodgepole ladders reach the base of the dwelling:
three stories in places, a hundred stone rooms.
Noon heat wavers from fire pits
of the opened kivas. Brief shadows
at a window, footfall
on the terrace stone.

Far beneath the overhang, where full light
never touches, the dark cool
of heavy shade: cupped imprints along walls
collecting ghost water, sudden rivulets
filtered from the green table.
Grains stored in the cool caverns.

Despite the cords that keep us
from all but a sampling, I move in
and in. The quiet ripens
when the hikers leave.
Anasazi women felt
safe here, giving birth: a new cry
echoing off cascades of stone,
stilling the men
at worship below in the kiva.

Silence leans
from the rock as I place my palm:
a hollow, round from grinding,
the flushed pulse
from the sandstone walls.

DIXIE PARTRIDGE lives in Richland, Washington. Her poems in this issue are part of *Watermark*, the recently completed manuscript for her second book of poetry. Her first, *Deer in the Haystacks*, came out from Ahsakta Press in 1984. Her poems have appeared in many national and regional journals, and in several recent anthologies.