**In Lion’s Den/The Child Returns**

Dick Altman

*Southwestern Colorado*

Above me dance clouds of Indian drum

circles – You – woman agile as Lion

Canyon’s mountain cats – track our guide –

no less nimble than his cliff-dwelling Ute

ancestors – You descend – ladder by ladder –

like an orb weaver – four legged – spidering

down – so it seems – an endless filament

of gossamer rungs – fragile as glass – to a footpath –

narrow/fractured/rimming the canyon’s flanks

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Your dream: To inhale anew/camera

what you see and touch – Ute ruins

suspended/protected under sheltering

crescents of sandstone – Storybook scene

of fantasy – town of mystery – hanging

by a thread of rock – on the sheer face

of a crack in the world – Fathomless

cauldron – you explored – with awe

and temerity – years earlier as a child

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I – the timid poet – remain behind –

ride – in my mind – shoulders of eagles/

red-tail hawks – soaring in and out

of the great cleft – Other than tart-

tongued ravens taunting them – silence

swallows the canyon – a solemnity

you feel beating in the heart of each

handprint – building block – window/

doorway long devoid of life – Recalling

towers/walls/castles of the Middle Ages –

Lion’s age – faltering on hilltops

I once climbed a continent away

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We hear – from the depths – our guide

chant/bless Lion’s spirit – words binding

Native blood to sun/moon – wind/earth

Dry lightning – as if in affirmation –

bolts from clouds clotting/coiling

over the mesa – The canyon – in return –

belches up torrents of slope-shattering

thunder – Boulders – just missing

where you stood moments before –

unseat – clatter/tumble/bury in

the creek far below – *When skies*

*shriek* – yells our guide – as we dash

like children for cover – *Lion roars!*