

Spirit

At the worn yet polished pulpit,
in the contradiction of February's snowfall
and thaw, she adjusted her gypsy shawl,
gasped into the microphone, clutched the podium
with blotchy hands, those hands that scrubbed,
for years, what the rest of us left
under the pews, beside the trash cans,
our rings and watches next to the bathroom sinks
—and what left her lips was not a rocket's flare,

nor the jasper shock of bloodstone,
neither was it the pastoral turned diatribe
of a patriotic afternoon. It was the quiet
lift of the Samaritan, Rahab's offer
of protection for protection, the alabaster box
for head and feet, reins and heart,
and what kept coming, not quite reeling,
was unmeasured, almost obscure, and whatever
it was it unfolded like a leaflet,

unrolled like a Persian rug. It whirred
like the touch of a cardinal's wings.
It kept offering the altar of incense,
an evening's watch, forgotten psalms;
it unhinged the door of my traditions,
wiped away the veneer on my face,
dried up those hidden wells of anger,
brought myrrh to the corridors
of sickness. My sins arose in flame.

—Mark D. Bennion

This poem won second place in the BYU Studies 2012 poetry contest.