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## Side Canyons

E. Leon Chidester

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## Side Canyons

Cold winds drive late September  
down gutters of lower 26th,  
across her busy intersections  
and over trash of this littered park  
where I watch flocks of pigeons feed.  
They drop in pairs and threes  
from high cornice ledges  
of tired office buildings  
that line this urban gorge,  
disputing with starlings and  
sparrows the meager repast left  
by last night's bag ladies, sorting  
out supermarket loot, retrieved  
from dumpster's questioned cornucopia.

And now, this gust, sudden  
among limbs and lobes of ancient alders  
overhead, loosens a flutter of rust  
across the fracus, a tilt  
of other seasons that leaves me  
sensing, amid this tawdry mix  
of wings, a quiet stir  
as fall's other birds return.

Magpies and Stellar's jays, raucous  
 against impending chill  
 that drives them in from piñon flats  
 and drying creekbeds;  
 raptors riding migratory thermal drafts  
 down the length of mountain ranges,  
 circling momentarily above our lives  
 as if they catch some stench of death;  
 crows, that with cold claim town  
 again, refugees from smog-laced streets  
 in search of skies more open, of sun  
 still fluid through bitter air.

A distant call of killdeer, down  
 naked edges of the world, and sheer  
 brick walls of J. C. Penney's  
 begin to dream redrock cliffs  
 and canyon parapets. Sidewalks stream  
 with golden cottonwood and quail  
 that scramble over wash-smoothed stone  
 and out among sage to hide.

—E. Leon Chidester

Note: This poem was winner of the College of Humanities 1998  
 Eisteddfod Poetry Crown Competition. The theme was "City Canyons."