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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.”