

## 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 fracas, 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 kildeer, 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."