

Winter Rail Yard

I hear the coal train's organ note in the distance,
remember the two pigeons
circling together and pecking the open ground
between ties near the tracks.
They were smoke-purple birds, white-winged.
And even if a train by some surprise could pass over them
violently vibrating their walls on either side,
they would be safe in the center from every moving part,
not just the unearthly noise of torquing iron axle.
These birds probably have learned by now
that after its spray-painted flanks clunk and clunk and rail away,
it's all just the sound of commuters' engines again
and a slightly stronger morning sun.

—Matthew Scott Stenson

This poem won honorable mention in the 2018 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest sponsored by BYU Studies.