

The Quaking Aspen

(Populus tremuloides)

I have dwelt in the realm of the aspen tree,
In the Front Range Corridor of Colorado.
Nestled at the feet of the Front Range of The Rockies,
Fort Collins, about an hour's drive north of Denver.

I have walked in parks where the yellow-leafed aspens
Radiate their beauty, putting the conifers to shame.
Their slender, arrow-straight trunks, appear a ghostly hue,
The bark unlike that of any other tree.

I have seen the wooded slopes of mottled green and yellow,
The conifers and the aspens in a woodland checkerboard.
The conifers will out-compete the aspens,
But after fire, the aspens are the first to regrow.

I have driven down avenues of yellow aspen trees,
Which, for two weeks at the start of Fall,
Turn golden, so dazzling as to hurt the eyes.
And then the leaves fall; rows of sticks line the road.

I have been initiated into the secrets of the aspens.
A grove of aspens is just one organism living underground,
And each tree trunk is just another shoot that grows, then falls,
But the grove itself lives thousands of years.

I have walked among an aspen grove,
And I have heard the leaves whisper in the breeze,
Voices from the underworld begging to be heard.
The dispossessed Arapaho lamenting their fate.

I am as one with the other-worldly aspen trees.
Before Butch Cassidy, Sundance, Doc Holliday and the rest,
Before Ute, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Pueblans,
The Quaking Aspen – back through mists of time.