

TO KILL A CROW

Like a filthy wind-slapped rag, it flapped
out of a broken window in a rapid transit car
parked on the siding. Track workers, lunches
in laps, hunched inward as it screeched overhead,
landing its black insolence too close
to Holt's coffee. Holt's fast pitch zapped the crow
with an apple. Dust flew, the ole bird squeaked
like a cankered file, then hustled to the car roof
as Pete, the apple owner, squawked louder.

"Aw, it was just a reflex," said Holt. "Here,
take my candy bar." But Pete wouldn't have it,
curses converged in shoves and the crow feasted
on two kinds of bread and meat between shuffling boots.

After I broke it up, we clumped like toadstools,
glaring at the soot-winged offense, everywhere
at once, scarfing up the apple pieces.
"Where th' hell's my candy bar?" Holt pawed his sack.
Wind waved the wrapper stuck on the car roof.
We pointed and whooped.

There's no telling about a bunch of rail benders--
at least one has a record, one an engineering degree,
and one named Pike keeps his distance--
maybe our idea instead of his, smelling like he does
of Ben-Gay and yesterday's sweat. Holt muttered,
"Them birds're jinxes. My old man used to say
you can't even kill 'em
unless you're in league with the devil."
I saw Pike's hand fiddling with the heavy rubber band
around his broken lunch box but I didn't see the rock.

The crow took a header from the car and lay at my feet,
splayed wings, bulging belly, beak open to the sky
as guffaws and mimic caws moved past me. I bent
to pitch its finality in the trash truck. Jackhammers
started, vibrating the carcass, imitating life.

One claw closed; wings folded in slow dignity.
The crow rolled over, limped a step as I blurted HEY,
and exploded in the air like Satan's best expletive.
Crowing all the way.

Glenn Holloway