

TO KILL A CROW

Like an oily wind-borne 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 bird squeaked  
like a cankered file, then hustled to the car roof  
as Baxter, the apple owner, squawked louder.

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

After I broke it up, we clumped apart like toadstools,  
glaring at the soot-winged offense, everywhere  
at once, scarfing up apple pieces and crumbs.  
"Where th' hell's my candy bar?" Holt pawed his sack.  
Wind waved the wrapper stuck on the car roof.  
We all 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 was a farmer--  
he used to say you can't 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 off the car, landing at my feet,  
splayed wings, bulging belly, beak open to the sky.

Guffaws and mimic caws moved past me. I bent down  
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. As I blurted HEY, it limped a step  
then exploded into the air like Satan's worst expletive.  
Crowing all the way.

--Glenna Holloway