

Crows can't speak

My crow came lame
—the cat had been at it—
so, gloved hands, a cardboard cage,
a call to the appropriate authorities.
The mercywoman came in a blue van
to pick it up and no doubt put it down;
left me a dull hankering and smell of feathers.

I should have had the healing of it.
I should have spooned the sun into its throat.
I should have taught it words.
But some steel hobble held; my crow instead
went gentle under that good gas.

Almost I heard word-angels weeping
that I who slept nightfeathered in the monster dark
should prove a pluckwing mercy-monger of the killing kind.

Crows can't speak, the common wisdom has it,
until their tongues are loosed by the knife.
If I had taken my heart in my teeth and done it,
if I had squeezed that blackbrittle body in the gripe of love,
cut as a surgeon cuts,
waited and worked for that word-birth,
I might have had a voice with wings and claws:
hoarse for the harlot age,
black for the last days,
beaked for the yellow corn in choking fields.

Tom Lips