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Crow Discomfiture

Spoonerism: n. the transposition of initial or other sounds of words, as in *a blushing crow for a crushing blow* (after W.A. Spooner 1944–1930)

—*The Random House Dictionary*

It wouldn't have been easy to see
unless you were one too
in a field with a dozen other crows
pillaging half-ripe ears of corn—

your straight black beaks
rifling through an early harvest,
heads titled sideways at ground level,
everyone keeping everyone else in sight—

when the one you designated
sentinel, choked,
lost his timing, fell into a brown
study, waxed aphasic,

allowing birdshot to ring out from a hedgerow,
killing one of your number, injuring
two others, turning a tinkers'
picnic into a debacle.

Your clan would've reconvened
in the furthest woodlot
to censure the incompetent,
ragging on him about
responsibility, caravan ethics,

the importance of lookouts,
till the offender began to blush—
a thing you wouldn't have seen

unless you too had sat in judgement,
all impartiality left in that cornfield,
your nerves jangling, pulse fluttery,
brain abuzz with avian contempt.

Then you might've seen a bird
fly away feigning nonchalance,
cawing unconvincingly,
a dull, ash-grey colour, stripped

of all rights and chattels,
forbidden to pick up anything shiny,
condemned to freeway off-ramps
and echoing, permanently shaded ravines.