

PAUL HARRISON

November

“Of all the birds, the scavengers have
an acute sense of vengefulness.”

I remember Grandad pulling the scarecrow
Up from the muck of the cut-field,
Clumps of wet clay clinging to the stake;
Leaf-plump head on a broken neck,
The folded pant legs of an amputee
 Faded red scarf for luck—
Loose threads, bunches of straw
Whiskered the tramp's coat hung
On a burlap torso: the waiter's jacket
From Old Franklin at the Elm Hurst Inn

Stretched-out on its crucifix
He tossed the dank body onto the trailer bed
Without thanks,
The damp weight thudding in blunt ceremony—
A tortured man lying finished on the rack
(And the fleet thought that I should cover
 its eyes with a handkerchief)

November is the end of its watch
The crows having moved on, cornrows harvested,
The waddling hinds of the raccoons
Fat-hanging out of someone else's garbage cans;
The nights now too cold for worry

After Gran's funeral
My sister dreamed the crows returned
Circling him as he lay face-up
Helpless under the sun; the rude birds
Bounce-landing on the chest,
Ripping at straw intestines

They had found out the truth,
That he was not as he seemed;
As they arrived to discover
The bad bargain of their summer, the sham stalemate,
Remembering their impasse high on the wires
The unnecessary caution