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Crow Mother

In dreams she is forever in our backyard,
her arms outstretched, the black veils of birds
swirling around her. The aluminum tins
are filled with meat scraps or peanuts
or cooked beans, and the crows
are a dark territory, as primitive
as the blood moon I see at dusk impaled
amid the willows by the river.

From my bedroom window, I watch
the way the birds stitch the sky,
how my mother grows old in their midst
then finally dies, is carried off
by invisible wings that stir the air.

Mud Madness

In those days my mother and I knelt
often with her parents in the garden,

weeding, or we studied a grackle
perching on a fence post in the rain,

or we gazed at a bent tree at the edge
of the woods, lifting crucified and skeletal,

piercing the viscous, melancholy sky.
I believed there was a tide of moon inside

our chests, and my grandfather spoke often
of being restless in the night, and he showed me

the wasps coming and going from their nests
beneath the eaves, rowing the body's primitive

boat, and he fed carrots to the horses
by the fence, scattered seeds for the juncos

in the winter. Once I found the remains
of a raccoon frozen into an ice sculpture

not far from the barn. The creature was
mad with death, forgetful. And I dreamed

that night of a snake that lost its skin,
of the hollow sleeve in a rotting log.

Then, come summer, there was something
clerical in rising in gray light to step out

onto the patio, something in my grandmother's
pendulous plums by the back door,

almost but not quite ripe, the orioles
leaving the gnawed fruit to dangle.

It was as if there was an earth
that came before, that plunged

its needle deep into a vein we couldn't
see, that made of the years

an unknown object of desire.

Doug Ramspeck

Doug Ramspeck is the author of five poetry collections. His most recent book, *Original Bodies* (2014), was selected for the Michael Waters Poetry Prize and is published by Southern Indiana Review Press.