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Totem

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Totem

Once again at spring dusk the crow caws
and I step out back to greet him perched
in the locust's topmost branch, jag-edged

and charred. I believe he lulls here on his way
to a nearby roost where others await him.
Their calls echo from the woods, ancient

oak or sycamore sprawl tall enough to hold
all that black. When he caws again
the notes vibrate me back

to the hospital lot at sunrise, my mate's end near.
My car stopped inches from a crow crouched
on a concrete wall, and when he turned to face me,

I heard my breaths, saw his furred breast expand,
contract. All faded but the crow and my heightened sense
of smell: hyacinth lobes in their final fling, splayed apple

blossoms, lilac blooms soon to open, earthworms
softening soil, and the mud-musk of his wings.
I like to imagine this crow in the scarred locust,

nude of bark, the same bird which calmed me
that long ago dawn. I await the moment
of his ascent, and the velvet beat of his wings.

Karen George, author of *Into the Heartland* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), has been awarded grants from The Kentucky Foundation for Women and Kentucky Arts Council. Her work has appeared in *Memoir*, *Still*, *Single Hound*, *Thumbnail*, *Vestal Review*, and *Barcelona Review*. She holds an MFA in Writing from Spalding University.

