

The Covenant

DOUG RAMSPECK

Her flowers are dying in the old clay pot.
Her tomato vines are withering. The pact
she made was never with the dirt. At night
she dreams that the massasauga snake
leaves a final gift of skin beside the pond.
And the congealing waters—waters that offer
a catfish, belly up, floating in the shallows—
smell in summer like rotting, bestial flesh.
And because a woman's body is a prophet,
she sleeps shivering by her husband in July.
She would throw the bones and read them
if she could. She would twist her fingers
deep into the entrails. But for now she rises
in the dark and imagines expelling like a toad
a black and coiling string of eggs. Imagines
her breasts swollen, bloated with the milk.
Once she saw a mangy bitch nosing, nosing
at a pup. The pup's eyes were crusted shut.
This is our covenant. This is our covenant.
The bitch licked then snarled then licked.