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Westward Ho

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Westward Ho

Jeri Schelhaas

The spirits of pioneer women join me
As I drive past Omaha, going west,
Across the Missouri,
Alone, with nothing but the shadow of a
Hawk in the left lane of the interstate

By my side

A spirit shows me her homestead,
Two rooms maybe, clutching the hillside,
A lean-to of a barn,
Her children's faces in the windows,
Wash on the line,
Blowing bright,
Her self in the doorway,
The back of her hand brushing her moist forehead,
Her feed-sack apron shoeing

A black crow

Catches my eye
As it crosses the interstate where
The early fog rolls over the land
And settles, slipping between silver maples
Single file along a creek bottom,
And softly gives way to
A hilltop graveyard where
Old women, young women, tired women,
Rest, wait,
Remind me of their dreams:
Flowing farmland east to west, north to south,
A sheltered hollow for a house,
Beehive, garden patch,
A couple chickens and a milk cow,
A tree branch for a sack swing,
Evening games of kitten ball and
Annie, Annie Over,
Cat tails, wild yarrow,
Silent nights with children in bed,
A young couple watching the stars,
The wolf at a distance,
Hope hanging onto

The moon

Hangs like a shadow in the morning sun
Drawing my eyes westward
Just over a hill where
A pair of golden arches breaks the horizon
As well as my dreams,
And grows larger.

An outlet mall spreads herself at its feet.
More women, tired women,
Brush damp hair strands from foreheads,
Hush whiny children with candy,
Cling to overflowing shopping bags,
Sell themselves for the
Open grave of a dead dream.