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Byway

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Robert J. De Smith — September 2019

It is everything:
The woman rigged out
To hang steel girders
Onto a red skeleton in a farm yard,
She stepping from her pickup
In flannels and a harness;
The shivering shoulders
Of the Loess Hills,
Oxbows long cut off,
A derelict faded yellow
Excavator beside a ditch,
A hawk gaining altitude with labor,
The road at times matching
The river bends, then rising
Over successive hills,
Then arrow-straight beside rusted rails.
A magnificent tall hip-roofed barn
Replete with a cupula,
Now weather grey and stark.
A boy, in a cerulean hoodie,
Beside the road, right door open
Of a ridiculously large truck,
A dualie,
Looking furtively over his shoulder
As he relieves himself in the ditch;
A glazed block double grain bin,
Shelterbelts of trees,
Shorn of their farm places;
Sand and gravel,
Extracted from pits,
In its various hues of brown;
And the river itself, winking through trees;
The blue-green and brighter green
Of field on field of soy and corn,
Rising on contours.
Decrepit machinery, parked in neat rows
The last time they were of use;
Towns, spired and roofed, almost a relief,
But so is the next bend,
Bridges and gravel turnouts
And must be a dozen turkeys,
Two grown, the rest small replicas,
Crossing the road and disappearing
Into the tall grass and
Black-eyed Susans.