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The Mississippi River and Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin

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M. A. Daly

The Mississippi River and Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin

This is my language written in islands,
the language of snakes.

Over the broad view from the highest point
a birch tree leans on a stem of ice,
shaking its cymbals from the mounds.
The slow barges arrive.

If there is anyone to love
the Mississippi will have loved before,
moving south without leaving this place,
sending up mists, flesh pink at dusk and dawn,
that the town may shine through,
small, celestial.

This is my own spinal fluid and yours.
Yes, it splits us. It joins us,
making sense of its banks:
Iowa, Wisconsin, North America.
Lying awake, we hear coyotes.
I remember the West, and am comforted
while you imagine dismemberment.

But listen again: it's the whistle
of the train vanishing
in the track between river and cliff.