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The U.S. Geological Survey as Fortune Teller

Stephanie Coyne DeGhett

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DeGhett: The U.S. Geological Survey as Fortune Teller

THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY AS FORTUNE TELLER Stephanie Coyne DeGhett

The only tiny black square on the 1908 USGS map
of that stretch of road stands for the hired man's house,

enclosed on three sides by cornfield in full tassel each
August. The geological survey does not include the cornfield

on its legend or the maples by the road that, in spring,
hold buckets at four points of the compass. Season to season

there was always a hired man although not always the same
man and the children who were a little ragged,

perhaps, in the midst of the cornfield, were not always the same
children and the map does not show them. In spring, the fire

department volunteers hold a training drill, torch this long-
abandoned house, and, of course, the map gives no sign of them.

The blaze shoots up through the fallen roof and licks the ribs
of its frame, leaving a charred bathtub, fire-blasted bricks,

pigeons wheeling, looking for a new roost, the maples
in full leaf, unscorched, and now the black square on the map

is a blackened square of cellar hole, the surprisingly
small and inadvertent prophecy of the old map.