## Two Mississippis · John Gery

for Rebecca & Darryl

I

If the river is a woman who awakens and splashes morning in her eyes, who stretches her arms and dips them in the dance of dawn, then combs her hair with sunlight, as she turns and twists to listen to the brush of trees beside her in the early breeze, who hums and dresses delicately, easing her limbs into her dappled skirt, her mottled sleeves, who sips her tea then glides out to the gate to greet the traffic passing there, and who on entering the street begins to stray a little, just a little (unaware the obstacles her independent means impose on those who'd rather she remain inside and watch her flowers grow, not slow their swollen progress to some venal shore), then bends and wanders, when the weather's right, and reaches toward the south and, reaching, dreams the dreams inspiring others drifting by to fetch her sparkle, taste her sigh, or slip behind her gaze to take a swim, then who are we? Her lover stealing from her bed, his appetite sated? Her child who, ignoring how he's sucked her dry, sucks harder?

Her god?

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And if the river is a man rugged and brown, but round and muscular, who wanders through the wilderness at dusk, who plucks a fallen branch, then ambles on between the trees, bowing and rising, who at coming to a clearing scales a rock, pausing briefly, rubbing his sides, then hums and winds around the hills to wander down into a pine grove on their farther side, who feeds the beavers, beetles, birds, and bears thinking him kind, who veers through twilit shadows, their brilliance like a memory that flashes and is gone, who tells himself those stories that echo in the breeze they're carried on, whose grey eyes pool when he beholds the sun at last, and at the last who spreads his arms to seize its light, then turns to go alone once more in darkness, leaving in his wake no sign of having been there,

then who are we,

waiting in silence near his path, who strike, then leave him on the forest floor for dead? Are we, earth's thieves, so starved that we must bleed the bled? Can no kind words for us be said?