

Undressing The River



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The Center for Book Arts

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Ocean Voyager

"Sepia Swan"

mother quivers
at my cheek

"let this face

be your passport—
smooth as cream."

I float

out of port
New Amsterdam,

leggs snuffed

under water—
silk skirts.

I Tubman

other Creole
daughters across.

Mount

the distance, fixing
my one good eye: how

precisely to balance

the crimson (serviette
& egg-white (gloves

nesting at her fugitive

knees; Sally
is about to be

engaged. Sam (her Yank

does his best
not to look at me.

"yeah

though I walk
through the valley"

Late,

so very late,
it's early morning . . .

old moon
 chortling my cigar's
 stubbed star— unlaced

cambric
 & fluttering
 eye-let,

corset
 & pantaloons
 I give myself

wholly
 to the horizon.
 Penumbra legs

on the ship's
 rail: "I'm free."
 Tomorrow,

my glass eye—
 open as
 sunlit water

shot
 through
 a telescope, I'll meet

Sam's eye,
 Refusing
 to look down.

Water-silk.
 Damascus steel.
 Foulard mandarin collar.

Refusing
 to be the one
 explored.