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Mississippi River, near Cape Girardeau, Mo.

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MISSISSIPPI RIVER, NEAR CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO.

My father and I take our usual walk
by Cape Girardeau's sea wall that steers
the river as fast as possible past us,
from Minneapolis to the sea. The wall's
spray-painted with messages of love
and hate along the river side. And eagles.
Some skill went into them. One perches,
a Harley Davidson logo, brand name below
the sketch, the other bird in full flight,
and under it, Isaiah: "They shall mount up
with wings as eagles." Some Huck Finn, here,
still shakes off the weight of widows
and deacons—Oh motorcycles, wings, rushing
water! I have not had freedom in my life.
Crossing these granite rocks on shore,
I think, now, at this age, how it would be
to kill the wild pig and light out in a canoe.
Those on shore could bury my memory.
It would do no good for my father to weep.
The long river would dash me to the gulf,
where the land would open its hips
and I would float into clarity, and a sweet
brine. The water under me would turn to sky.
My canoe would be a smile, and I would
paddle from island to island, saving lives.