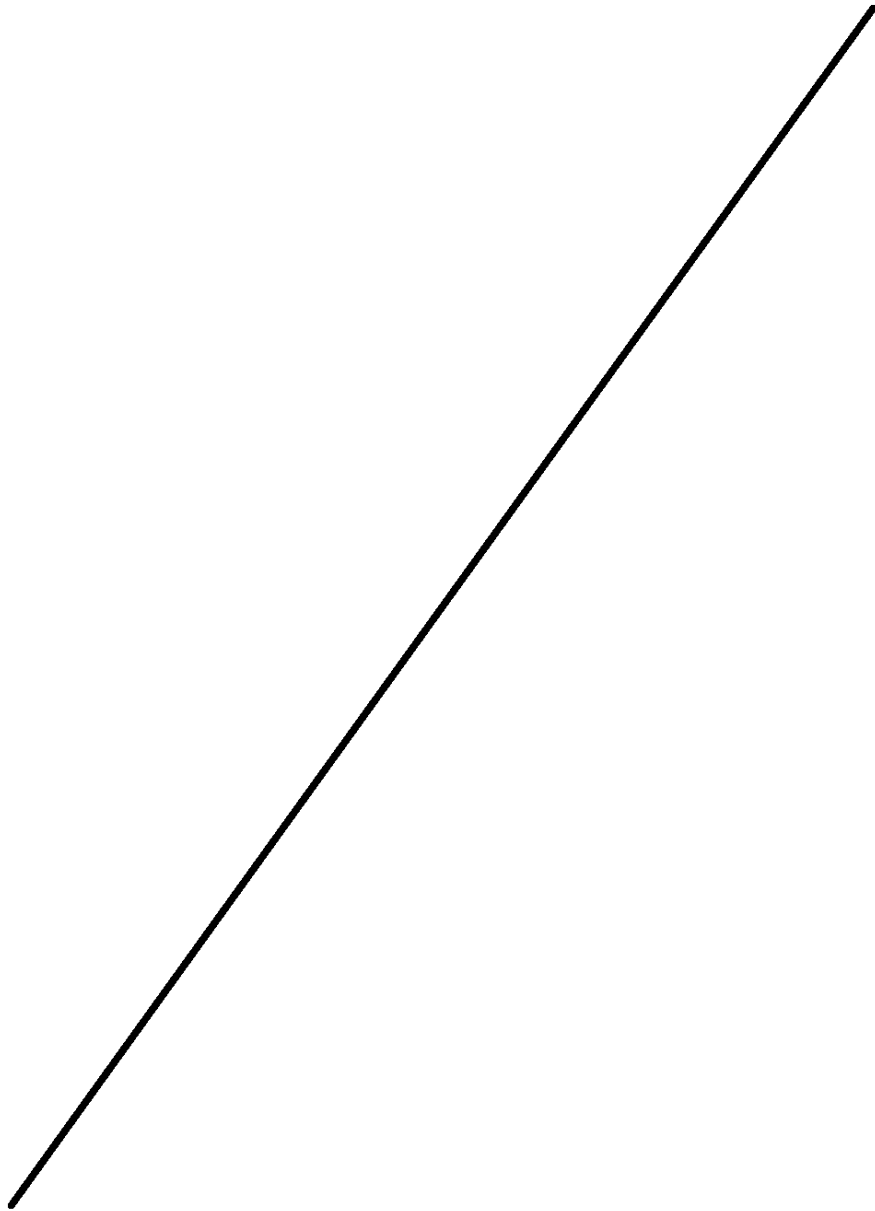


24 MEDITATIONS

ON

THE RIVER

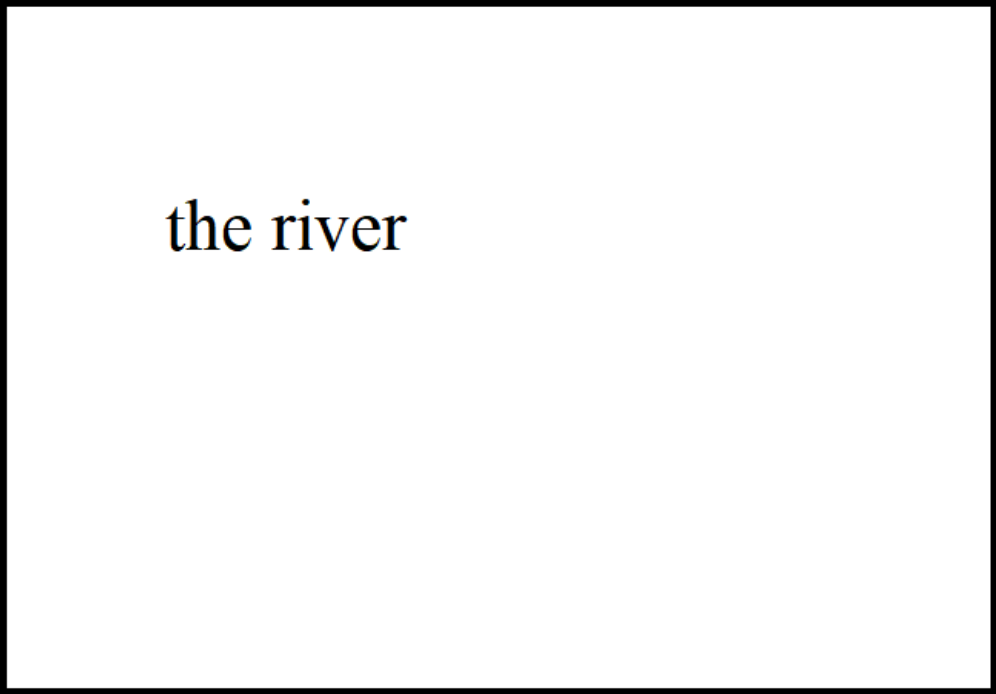


(BY MICHAEL MANDER)

1.

Sometimes the river seemed like a metaphor for my life, though in many ways I knew it was the inverse that was probably true: that my life was actually somehow a metaphor for the river.

2.



the river

also the river

3.

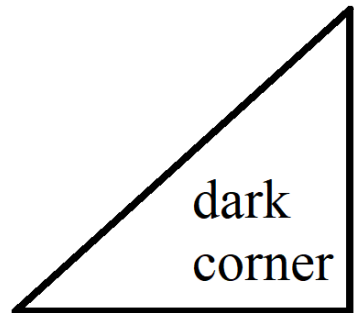
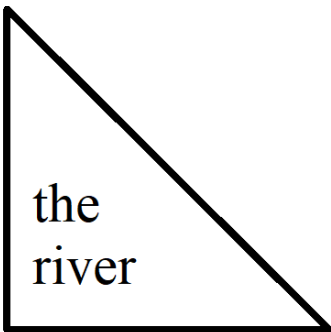
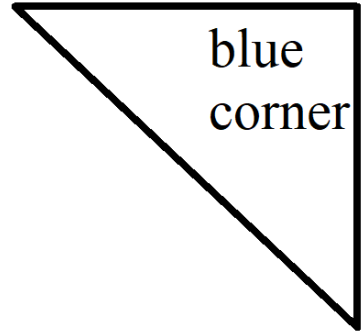
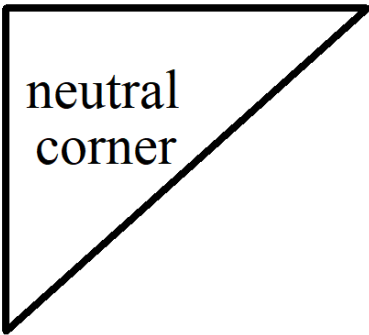
All of the universe's sadness
concentrated into a microscopic
grey square.

The shadow cast by your inability
to conform to society
is like a diving board you're constantly
trying to cannonball off of.

Some people get pardoned
and some people get punished.

Some people get paid millions of dollars
to pour concrete into the river.

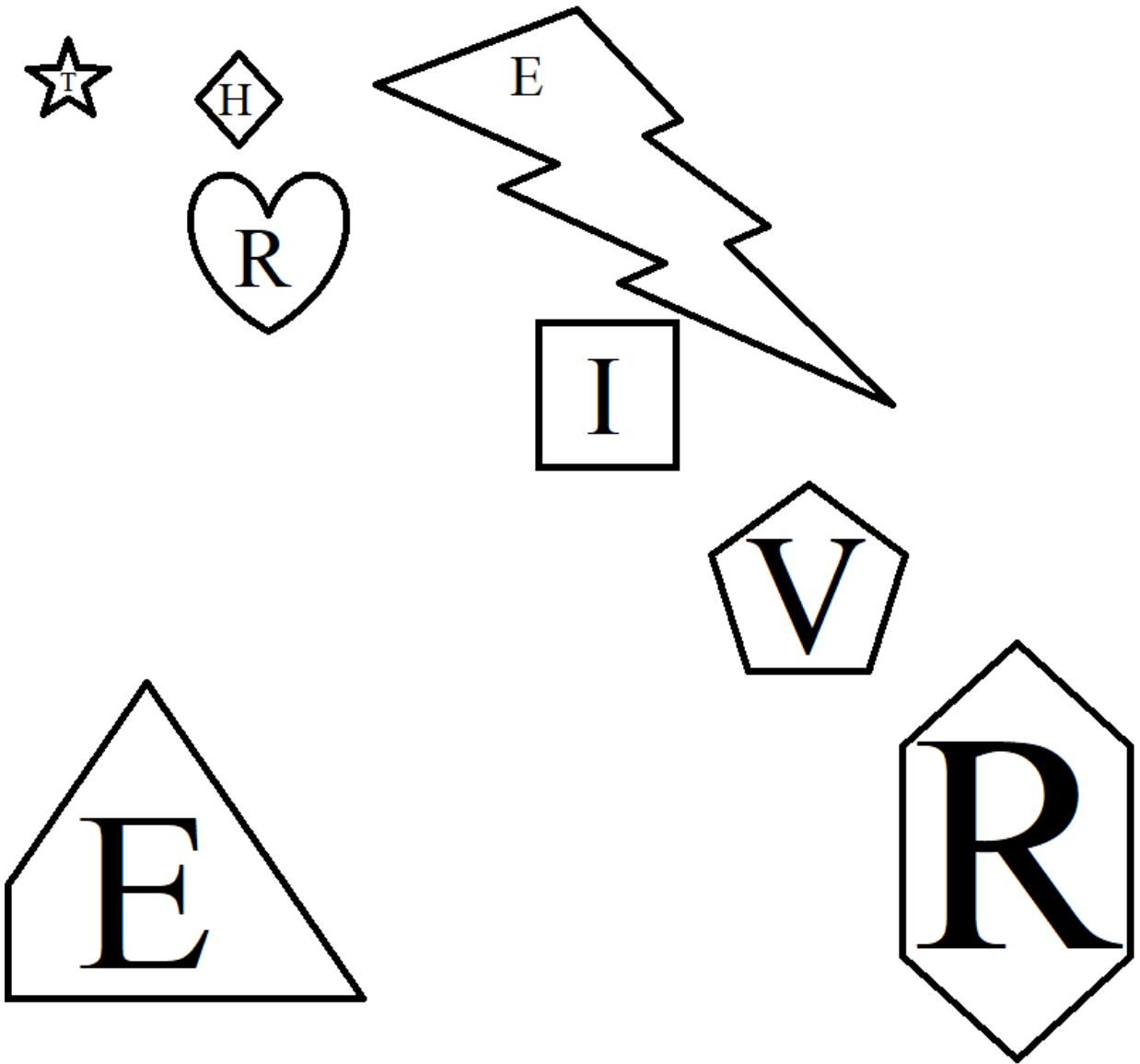
4.



5.

The way the light played across the surface of the river seemed to me somehow significant. As though I could gather the light up like coins, coins whose value lay beyond just some economic abstraction. I dove into the river, but that didn't really solve anything for me. When I crawled back out a few years later everything around me seemed changed, people were nicer to me but oddly colder, and even the grass appeared to be swaying in a passive-aggressive way. I started jogging back to my apartment, taking every shortcut I knew of to take, but each one lead me back to the river, the river I'd just emerged from, the river I would eventually learn to follow for the rest of my life, sometimes swimming with its current and sometimes swimming against it, but always allowing it to chart in some way my bewildering and often obstacle-fraught course, though it would take me several years to get over my initial disdain of it, which was so vast and overwhelming at first that for about a decade I could think of basically nothing else at all.

6.



7.

The grass
is always greener
on the other side
of the river.

8.

the diver

the giver

the liver

the quiver

the shiver

the sliver

9.

You acquire an unflattering desire
to become great.

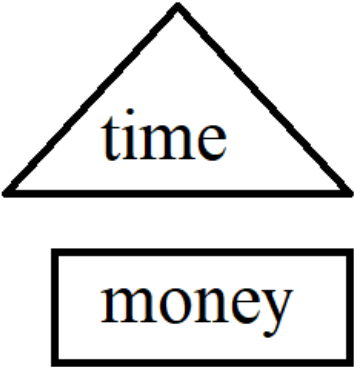
You watch heaven's gates swing open
and into the city march a troop of acid-
tripping philosophers who can't seem to govern
their own lives beyond reacting to whatever
breakfast cereal is placed directly in front of them.

You say the word "real"
but it doesn't feel right.

You go outside and you look at some trees.

You sit by a semi-frozen river and you draw
your own hand.

10.

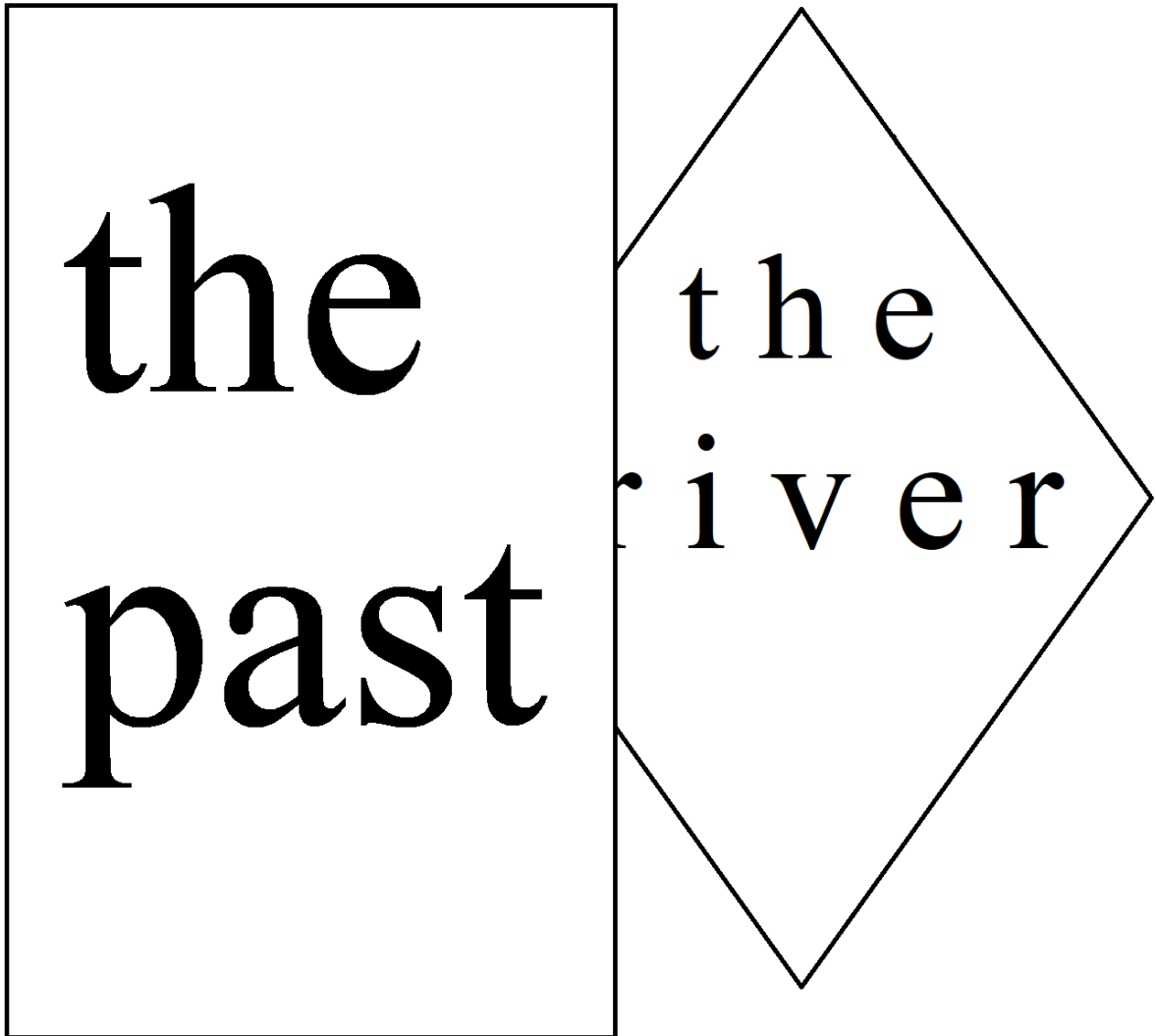


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11.

The scientist was tired. She had been studying the river for over a decade now, keeping up the painstaking endeavour despite the ever-increasing futility of her attempts. Maybe it was time for her to just give up and go home. “Home?” mused the scientist. A hoarse chuckle involuntarily escaped her throat. Suddenly it was raining hard. Within seconds the scientist felt water pooling about her ankles, as though she’d put the river on like a pair of socks. “So is this what I am now,” the scientist wondered to herself, “some sort of nonsense-human or whatever?” The scientist could’ve punched a hole through the river but her hands were shaking too hard to make a fist. Her hands were shaking too hard to even hold herself properly. The rain fell directly onto the scientist’s brain, somehow bypassing her skull. The scientist didn’t know what was happening to her. She felt like everything had been pretty much fine before all of this.

12.



13.

Everywhere I went people asked me about the river.

14.

how

the river

why

15.

“I haven’t even seen the river,” the man admitted to her. “Then you aren’t allowed in here,” she replied and slammed the door in the man’s face. The resulting whoosh of air knocked the man’s glasses off. “Hey c’mon,” the man moaned staring blurrily at the recently-closed door, at everything that lay behind the door, at the entirety of his stupid narcissistic past. Soon large flakes of snow started dropping from the sky, zigzagging about as though evading some invisible assailant. “Fallen once more upon the thorns of life,” mumbled the man as he half-heartedly dusted the snow off his glasses with his scarf. When he finally put his glasses back on the world appeared to have grown radically larger, as though swelling itself in preparation for one final blow.

17.

You jump into the river.
You find a snake there the size
and shape of a human being.
You stare at your own face reflected
in the dark and probing eyes
of the human-seeming snake.
You ask the snake if it believes in God.
The snake gives you some money.
Somehow everything seems realer.
The river fills up with light.

18.

the river

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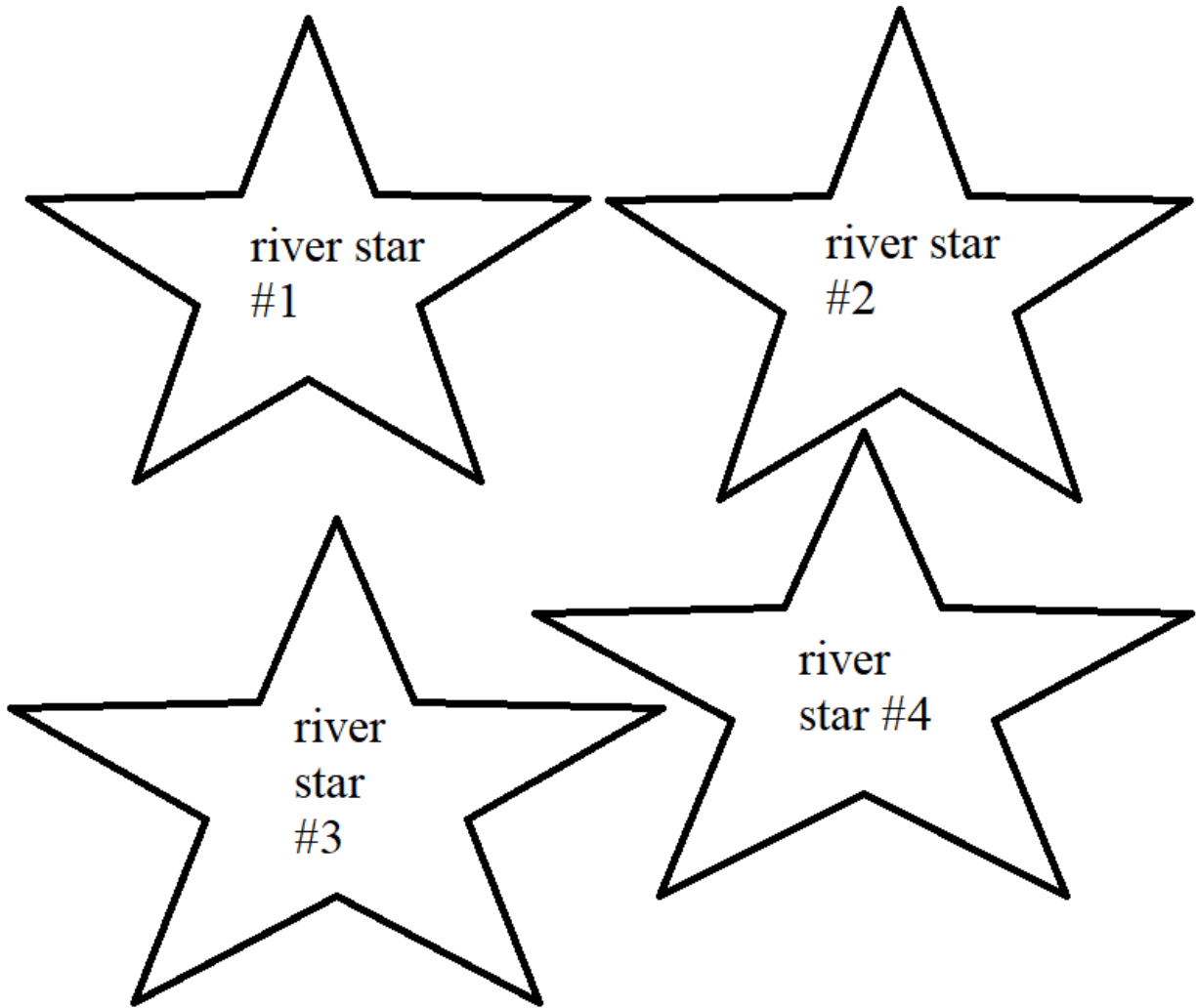
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19.

The artist climbed in through the window, dragging behind him a 300-pound sculpture made from plastic weed containers and rubber cement. The sculpture was in the shape of the river and the artist wouldn't sell the sculpture to anybody, not even for a hundred million dollars, not even for all of the money in the world. Meanwhile the artist's son paged through a dilapidated copy of *Animal Farm* in the attic several floors above. The book, in the boy's opinion, wasn't as good as any of Kafka or Dostoevsky's shit but it was still better than most of the other books they were forced to read in school. Later that night the boy snuck out onto the roof of the house and smoked a spliff with his neighbour, a red-headed girl from Australia who thought *The Brothers Karamazov* was the greatest book of all time. "Practically perfect," she said smirking and with only the slightest trace of an accent. A breeze seemed to be blowing from several directions all at once. The stars above their heads reminded the boy of tiny dandruff flakes.

20.



21.

He was trying to make adjustments. He was trying to lose himself in something significant as opposed to the quasi-hedonism he had been subscribing to for the five or six years previous. He was trying to put his mind back together again. He was trying to take his entire history apart. He was trying to prove himself more than what he'd been so far, more than just some biological happenstance, more than just a pile of compacted dust. He had an almost maniacal craving for experience, for something to just go ahead and happen already. Part of him felt like he had no choice but to meet the present moment with the fervour the present moment appeared to require of him. Some other part of him knew that all he needed to do was slow down and stop thinking about it so much. He felt lost but alert, alert the way a cat caught in a tree can be alert, more alert than he'd maybe ever felt before in his life. It was kind of like pushing through a cave with only a candle to guide you, he sometimes thought, some meagre stub of a candle you're astonished to have gotten lit or even obtained in the first place.

22.

the truth



the river

23.

as subtle as the apocalypse
you make your retreat
into the ocean waves that birthed you

