

light in a black scar

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by

Jake Berry

E·RATIO

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E·ratio Editions

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light in a black scar

An Element of Descent	7
The Labor Camps	8
Fiefdom	9
Remnants of Anarchic Heat	11
Return : Voice	12
Cat is . . .	13
Jefferson in Hell	14
Drinking Gourds	16
Turpentine	17
Elision : Elements	18
At 2	19
War Poem 5	20
Flying Lessons	21
Elision : Elements 2	22
Nucleotide	23
The Inevitability of Sleep	24
What man . . .	25
A Curse Against Drought	26
Egypt, Alabama	28
Foment	29
Revolution Covert	30
eyes slide out . . .	32
Eclipse: Seizure	33
Not Knowing	37
Information: a screenplay	38

light in a black scar

An Element of Descent

A secret list
he buried

The petrified hands
of an orangutan (our antagonist)
in a polished stone box

It might have been
 his skull
He was never sure

But for a moment
 every morning
 when a bluebird came
 and tore the lids from his eyes
 he thought he could remember
a pit in the sky
 where his mother crawled
 and drank the honey
 that seduced her to conceive

It might have been his skull
or a wave of meat
driven by a hammered nerve

The Labor Camps

deliberately light
in a black scar

a handful
of insects scattering

What remains of your palm
after a day moving rocks
till your eyes go numb

Neon trapezoids
torn at right angles
streaming from the
back brain.

Fiefdom

A fist around the edges —
 slurry
at the heart

Tanks
Absalom
 The garter worn twisted

Thieves torn
from their barracks
and scattered

Names are traded
at the temple gate

Carcass swells
in splendid arrangement

Slowly the loom
 breaks
 stolen to rust,
 the prime generator

Who are these liars
that captivate the populace?
Is the body of fear
a new and reeking
 God?

Leave them lie
and they will rise
into an impotent cloud
and piss
the backward flood

Take to the closet
and cry out

The rain lilies
don't give a damn
They know the lawn mowers
are coming

Remnants of Anarchic Heat

1

I will tell you who I am
when I show you how I fall.

It tastes like

a coven
of gray birds
nestled
in a barn —

it trickles
in cool lizard tongues.

The wasps
dying on their nest

drift to the floor
where it is always wooden and old
and dust is a mystic substance.

2

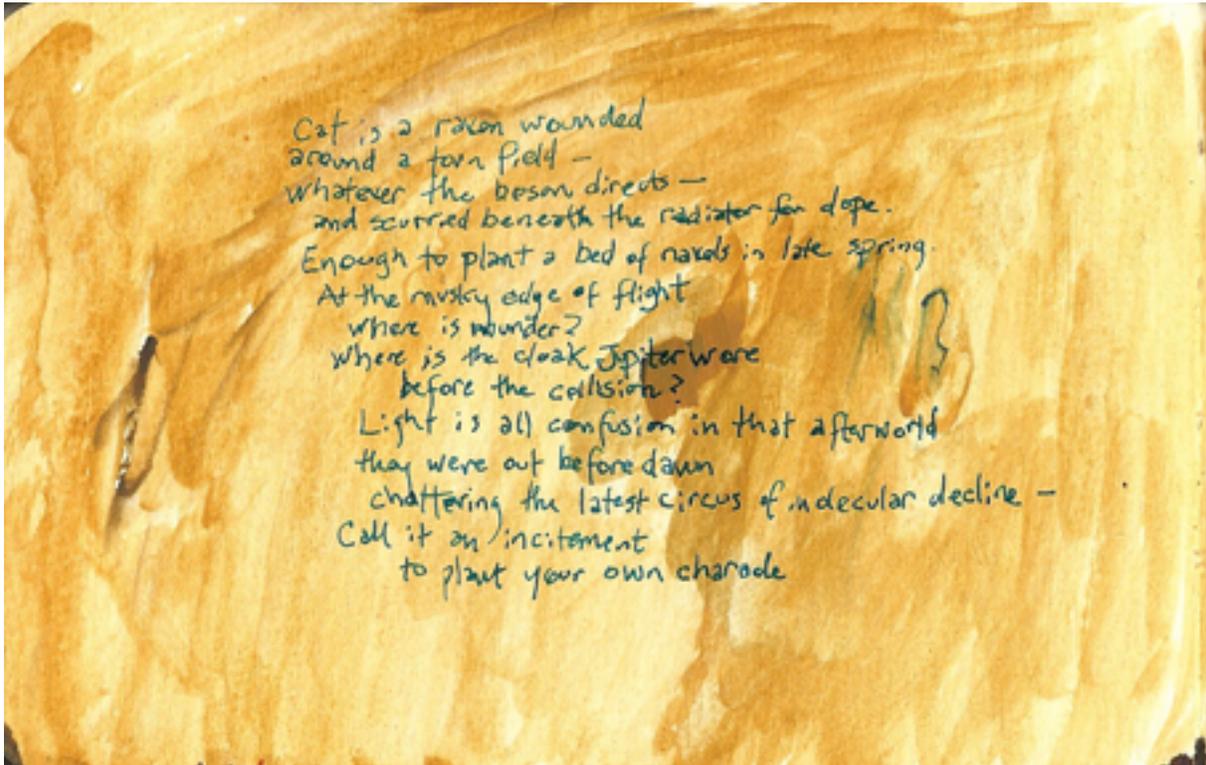
I know their yellow eyes
well enough to name them — they are made of black fire.
I invite them in and they are at work again
beaks and needles tearing at the wires
and the cats won't let me sleep.

Return : Voice

Even where I buried
the hummingbird's ruins
The rock on its roof turns green
takes a lung
and forces a machine song
silent long enough for the valves
to swallow their grace.

Dissemble a breath
in stark light
wet philosophy
come to rust weaving
Even there, too late
a morning with its sedative metal
low
for a hollow reed.

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Jefferson In Hell

Come down to mama
Come down to mama
Come on down to your bone sad mama
and drink the good Lord's tit.

Cough.
Flagellation.
Requiem.
We have seen the process heaving.
He can't suffer it again,
another cold alabaster mannequin
disrobed
& trailed in gray debris.

Trapped inside her petticoats
Venus sneezes, barks and wheezes.

Who'd believe if she confessed
a low rebellion in Storyville.
The fishmonger sold his grave
to Marie Laveau
who rolled the dice to thief
him grace.
The feast of crescent
deadlight Ramadan –
16 chain gang
republicans bleached
in Plato's toilet
if you can bear the newsprint stench.

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Come down to mama
Come down to mama
Come on down to your bone sad mama
and drink the good Lord's tit.

Drinking Gourds

The land is ripe again
and full of fists.

Mouths crash through
the broadcast trees
swollen into splinters.

Pile on the old trucks
and scraggly men
coming down the dead roads
while their masters reek of gasoline
and trade them credit for their lives.

The guns have arrived
to rake the fields clean.

The state is reduced to an aftermath
delivered to widows leaning
against each other
begging for vultures
and the insurance man
with a check in his claws.

Turpentine

Him's got claws
in his beard
after hours, slow as
the creeping stink
of warm summer garbage,
Melissa
trains the
bats to
promenade
the gladiolas
2 rails short
of a track
feast upon these
spleen eye and drown

Elision : Elements

Two blue.
One white.

The White negates.
The Blues are almost
immutable, absolute.

What is read and unforgiven?
Where the tracks rise
and slumber.
Rise over the dead logs
that make a grid
above the river
above.

Leaving now
along with the white motion.

At 2

Not until 2 o'clock.

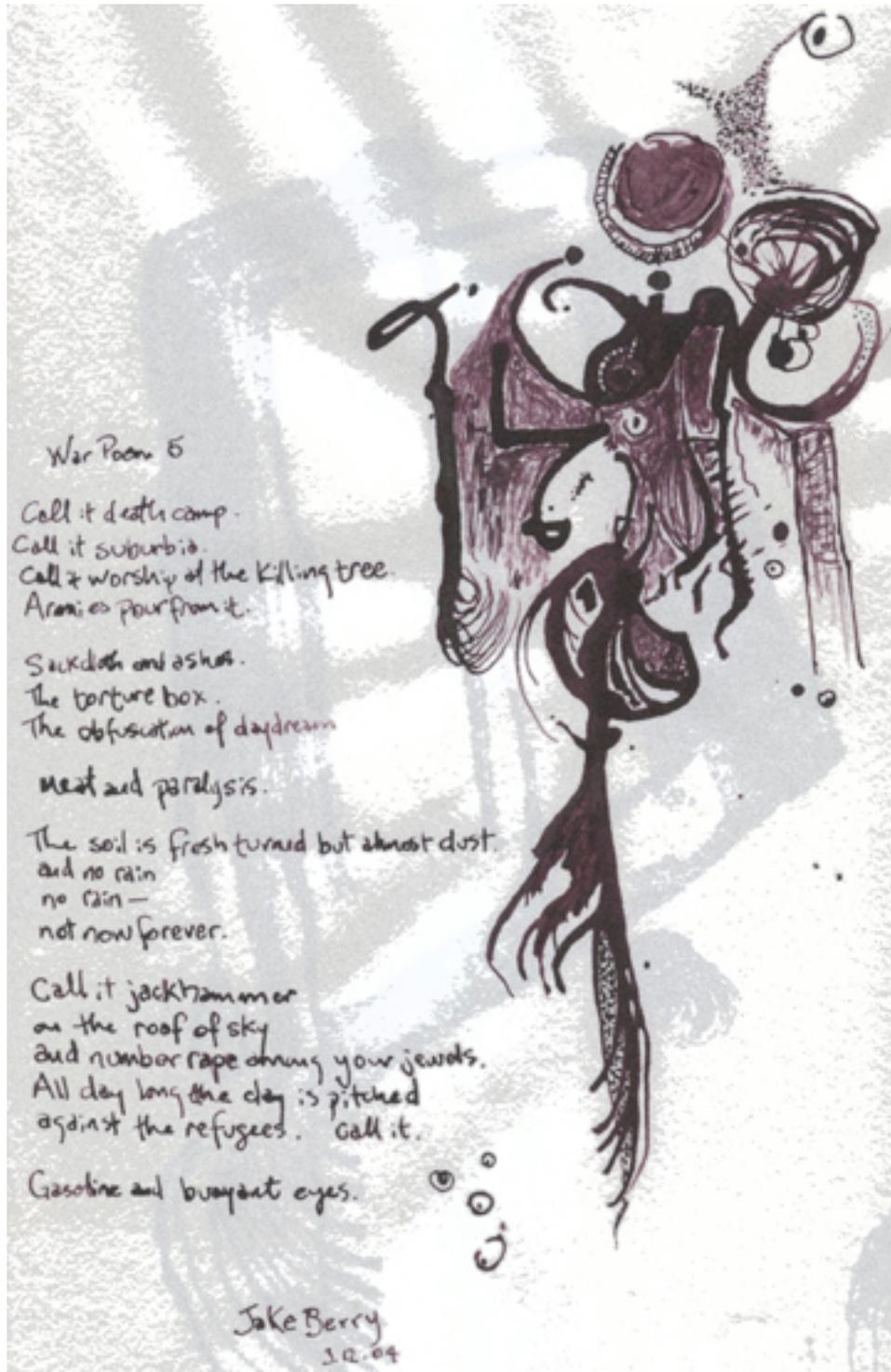
Not until the hammer falls –
and releases the cattle
to meat.

A plea rose –
A deep secret urgent voice
rose from the people –
from the heart they had learned to ignore

A storm as silent as
only the dead can whisper
visited the aristocracy in their beds
and made its demands.

Their servants found them
where the hammer fell
missing their eyes and pulse.

But not until 2 o'clock
and the doors are open
and the house is quiet
except for the servants' nervous feet.



Flying Lessons

All the men festering
 where I climbed,
and nothing but a rotten foot
 or science to name it.

I chose the balcony
 and llamas to drain and fuel
 their slow insipid wives.

Pack animals,
 fevers in old sangha,
Peruvian gold
 — it's features diminish,
 but not the zeal of troops
 bound for paradise
 to level the angel
 ejaculating street lamps on every corner.

“You're a steely wanker, ain't ya son?”
 The admiral asked as I
 trashed my climbing gear
 and tossed a map of Persia
 into my pipe.

“Nah,” I said,
“I just expect the trains
to run on time.”

Elision : Elements 2

What dwells in motion
is written
on the dog's belly

:such a cruel speculum:

What is the science
that muscles its number
against a flickering
eye in the drain

and speech worked against itself

mouthing quietly
for deliverance
across this

Nucleotide

This morning
isotope
shredding
radiant

self-torturous
eye vault
labor

The demons have come to America

dry and weak
His grace is a flat stone
A cudgel of desert
when desert repeats
in broken weather

9, (seized under)
The old man hovering
lime powder belly
erasing his mouth

these
these
teeth on a spoke

The Inevitability of Sleep

Officers, thugs from the northern cities.

A long parade
of red robes and
old bleached faces.

What is law?
What is the Lord's?
To be set, available
for destruction?

The wisteria comes hard violet
in a day
and falls
into a wreck of amplitude.

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A Curse Against Drought

91 days from equinox to solstice

91 days from solstice to autumn

The red clay turns
to fine gray dust
is carted away
into the sky
by men in white trucks

The grass turns brown
and disappears
The flowers drop away
The leaves wither
The taproot conserves
what moisture remains

How long till the wind
returns the dust
and storms our house
and lungs?
How long till the
chattering, singing
species fall?

Cry out
against the over-dominant star
Cry out against
the asphalt arteries

Cry out
for one last rain
for a week or a month
before we vanish
with all the others

If you see me on the street
don't speak to me
let me grow accustomed to invisibility
and put on my ghost clothes
and learn to drink echoes
and brood over the desert
without form and void
and memory
cut loose from its body

drifting and waiting
for the season to burn

Egypt, Alabama

It was close.

We almost smothered.

We fell apart

heart to stones
into one another.

I lied and said she was my sister
when I was only half her lover.

It was close.

We slept alone.

There were fallen empires to discover.

Foment

first thrust

torment me as a gate

preening

cause & distrust

voidlip

to paw

at matter's last

sediment of eyes

pranced to the veil of canker

Revolution Covert

A coffin is plain and made
for liminal comedy.
A knife, a bribe, a pleated skirt.
They were to finish the scene
regardless of the cost.
The rape of the landlady
would be expensive, but arriving
at *corpus delecti* would be impossible without it.

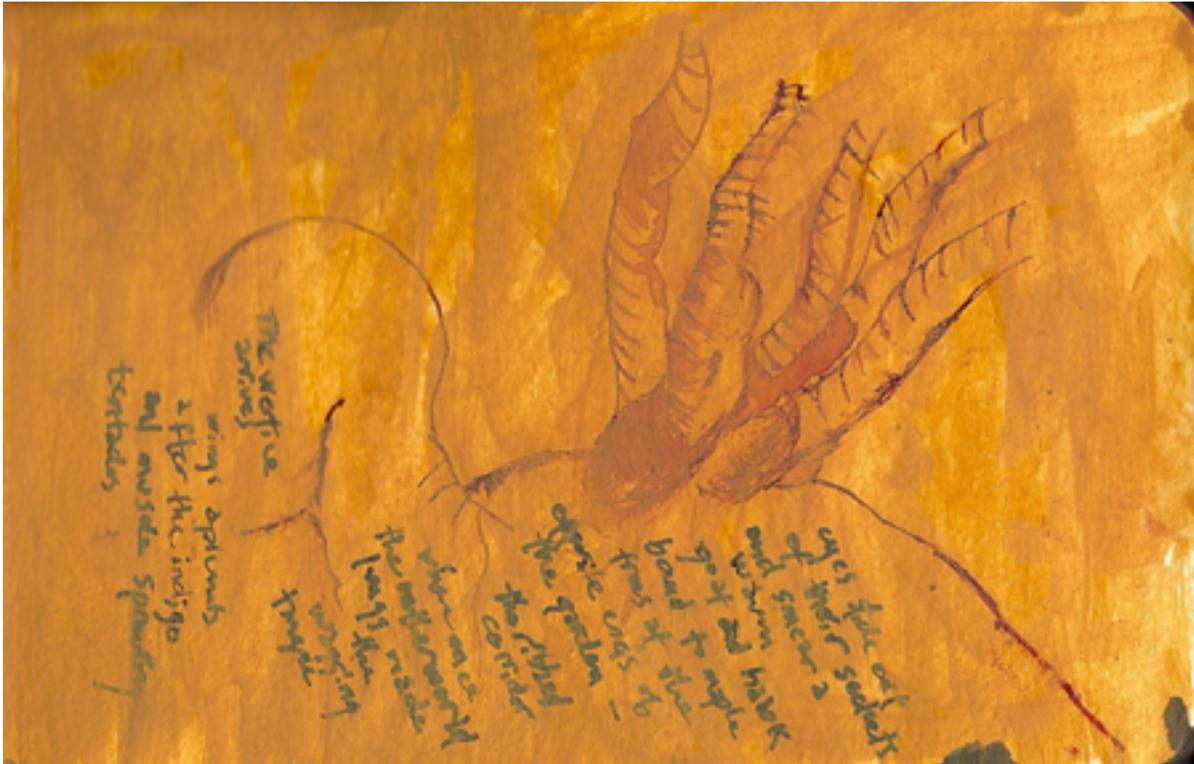
Roman helmets.
Perpetual conflict on the frontiers.
Ultimately, the song has no words.
We can't see one another.

The desire for snow in
our eyes is a fragile memory of
something we've never seen.
Still, there is an unusual abundance of water
and boats left to rot in their slips.

If you lean into the weather
it will destroy you.
That will be the nature
of everything in the future,
retaining an animal presence,
but robbed of any instinct
for self preservation.

Your hands will dismantle you in your sleep.
The surgeons will be powerless to help you.
She will be your crimson bride.
There will be laughter and music
and a trap door in the floor of extinction.

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Eclipse: Seizure

(homage to Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*)

Nothing moves but the world around it.
The limestone was poor quality and began to fracture.
You are going to die of a stroke.
The marksman walks with deliberate steps.
The deliberate man walks like an assassin.
The weight of the doppelganger invents machines.

Construction workers drive metal crosses into the floor of a concrete pit.
A flower is suddenly crushed.
Its delivery is abducted by a red-faced boy.
We are quick to leave hammers in the weather.
We are alive, but do not recognize the tension between its slow
dissolution and its precise utility.
Afterward, a crow lights in the road waiting for the others.

A row of metal poles weave in the wind.
Cables clang against them.
They are white in the stark light against the groundless night pitched
behind them by the position of the camera.

You were awakened by thunder and followed it with rain back
into dreaming.
They lie where they are shot without complaint.
The boxes come later, and the wheels no one lives to describe.

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If I were patient I would read the edge where grass disappears,
or the moss.

I would drink the drought and humidity that make it possible.

What is frail leaves its color in the shade.

We aren't alarmed by them.

We grow bitter and wait.

Atoms would know without distance.

We would not be afraid to ask.

The ploughs have come again.

Beneath the rot the old men are waiting.

In the odor, in the hives, a loud red voice.

Laced in the formula there are leaves that play the formula's demise.

What else could explain the pleasure of water?

The wires that gather nostalgia become granulations, become lice.

They promote a fever of self-deceit.

You are planning a rape in your father's quarry.

Your intent leaves your house abandoned.

Every tree around it feels artificial.

Long rows of street lights that leak into the populace.

Practice these maneuvers until you believe you own your fingers.

Return to the lime pit.

Is it mere sensation or does creation refract?

Holes are gathering.

The shovel men are waiting.

Rain is a chance to break the pattern.

There is where a day leaves you.

In the middle of it, torn.

A woman is singing in the echoing metal.

Often they speak to one another by reciting advertisements.

Cold air washes into the room from panels in the wall.

The heat is unbearable.

Supply lines have been cut.

I remember the mountains.
I remember a thunderstorm before dawn.
The lightning.
The flood and wind.

So many hours are wasted in empty conversation that
silence frightens us.

The rain again in the middle of the day.
The patios were empty and wet.
I almost fainted.
Nothing moves but the world around it.

He was hired to shave the corpses.
He waited all day, until sunset, so that no one would
see him enter the morgue.

What is the name of the flower on your dress?
I have seen it once before.
In a photograph.

They were watching her from the balcony.
They stopped talking and sat motionless while their cigarettes
burned down between their fingers.
In the room behind them the walls were covered with maps.
A long red ribbon hangs from the eaves. It attracts hummingbirds.
The sky behind it is lazuli blue.

We sleep on terraces cut into the hillside to take advantage of the
little rain we receive.
We are likely to receive nothing at all.

When they bind you will you sleep?
What will they discover when the lid is removed?

Can you hear what I'm saying
or have the birds found another place to nest?
Requiem for a featherweight.

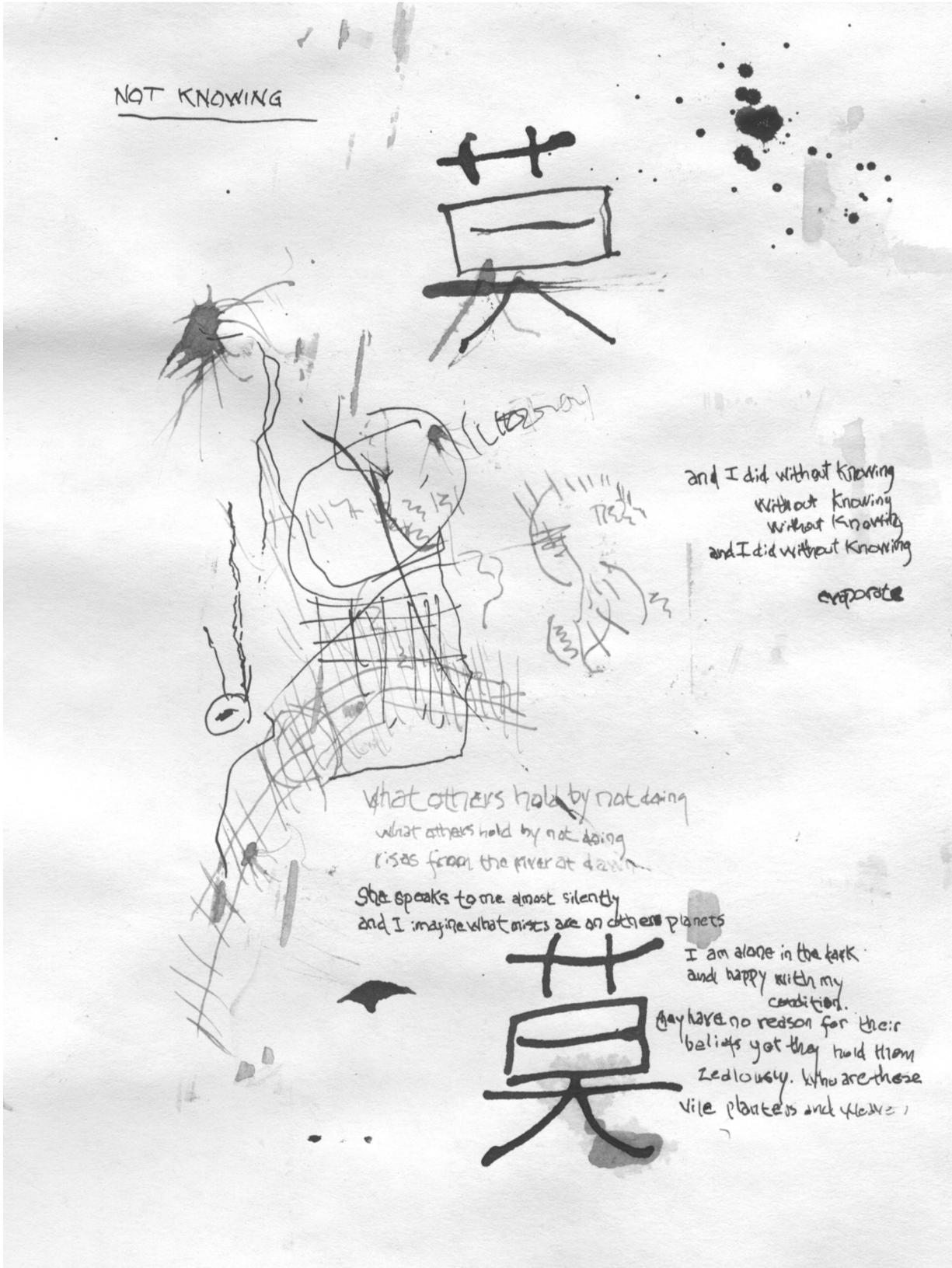
I don't mean to sound sarcastic.
I don't sound to mean.
A bulldog bound to a stake in the yard
barks at the sun because it will not let him rest.
Yes, I am speaking, deliberately, carefully.
However, I am not an assassin.
I do not assassinate to sound or mean.
You are coughing in the bedroom.
It means that your lungs are awake.

They have noticed the smoke, the humidity, the lizard climbing along a
crack in the wall.
She has found spiders there before, but there is something sullen about
this day, this particular afternoon.
A fish plate is a fossil.
I retraced my steps.
I found her in the café, asleep with her head on the table.
I asked the waiter, "Is she sick?"
He said, "No sir, but I think she may be a little drunk."

The plaster men are waiting.
I cursed the minister of Antiquities and walked up the serpentine stairs.

An eye, even this one, is where the world is removed.

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Information: a screenplay

Characters: Two women, in their 30s or 40s.

Scene: *Two women stand in a room before a large window. We see them at first whole body from behind, but quickly zooming into shots above the waist, sometimes only their heads are in frame. We never see them from the front and we never see either face entirely. The camera moves and zooms throughout the play, but the most we see of a face is a profile. On the other side of the window is a scene rich in moving color. Perhaps a house or other large structure on fire or some other scene of destruction that generates violent bursts of color. They might also be standing before a large video screen upon which is a violently colorful scene is developing. Alternatively, the other side of the widow could be colorful and active but peaceful, such as the wind blowing trees and leaves on a autumn day.*

FADE IN

One of the women is standing before the window looking out. We move in closer. For a few seconds she is alone, passively observing, long enough for us to study the scene, notice the details and feel ourselves waiting for something to happen. The second woman arrives, steps into frame and assumes a posture similar to the first. The first woman does not turn to look at her. They stand together silently, passive before the window.

After a few seconds:

First Woman (speaking forward toward the window): Did you see him?

Second Woman (also speaking toward the window): Yes. Well, what I mean is, I did see him, but I seem to be having trouble. . . .

FW: Remembering him. Remembering his face.

SW: Yes. Exactly. We spoke for several moments face to face. I remember noticing things about his appearance, but all I remember clearly now is the conversation.

FW: Can you remember any impression his appearance made on you?

SW: Vaguely. He seemed tired, older than before, as if he had aged years in a matter of days. (speaking more to herself): Why can't I remember his face?

FW: Do you remember what he was wearing?

SW: No, but I remember the condition of his clothes. They were worn almost threadbare and wrinkled as if he had slept in them. They agreed with my general impression of his condition.

FW: What about his voice? Do you remember anything distinctly about it?

SW: Yes. It was strong and clear, but with something new, a bit of an edge, slightly raspy. He coughed a few times while we were talking. He apologized each time.

FW: But he still spoke with same sense of authority?

SW: Oh absolutely. Nothing has changed.

FW: That was what I expected. He sounds more or less in the same condition as when I saw him.

SW: When was that?

FW: A few days ago. Maybe a week.

SW: Do you remember his face or how he appeared?

FW: No more than what you remember. More like impressions than actually remembering.

SW: Confusing isn't it? Frustrating?

FW: It would have been at one time. You get used to it. You have to or else you'll go crazy. It's a miracle we remember anything at all. As many times as I've seen him and had long conversations with him — once we even kissed — I still cannot manage to bring his face or any other details to mind.

SW: That's the way of things now isn't it?

FW: Apparently.

SW: You say you kissed?

FW: It was nothing. A gesture of friendship. (*She pauses, continues to look forward.*) So what is the information?

SW: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you knew.

FW: How would I know? I haven't seen him in a week. Maybe longer.

SW: I thought maybe one of the others. . . .

FW: No. None of them seem to know anything new. No one has seen him until today.

SW: That's peculiar. He spoke as if it was common knowledge.

FW: It might be to him. I've never been certain what his sources tell him or when.

SW: His sources, yes. Do you have any idea who they are?

FW: No. He speaks of them by name as if they are people we all know, but no one I've spoken to has any knowledge of any of them. For all I know he's imagining them as well as the circumstances under which he spoke to them. That would surprise me though. He's always been very reliable and he seems to be entirely convinced that he saw and spoke with them, as if they are regular companions. They pass familiarities, ask about one another's families, make jokes. I doubt it's all in his imagination.

SW: That's my impression as well. And he always seems completely at ease, even today when he seemed so fatigued.

FW: That concerns me though. I mean his appearance, the change in his voice, the coughing. It feels like something has gone wrong, as if conditions have deteriorated.

SW: But he remains calm.

FW: On the surface anyway. The information, was it bad? Was there any indication that circumstances have changed?

SW: No. He said we should continue with our work. He did mention that he expected the shops to be running sales and suggested it might be a good time to stock up on essential items in case the prices rise again later. He said we could expect the streets and shops to be a bit more crowded, but nothing like a panic.

FW: What about the other thing?

SW: The other thing?

FW: Yes, the weather device, with the holidays coming.

SW: He mentioned it in passing, but only to say it was operating efficiently. I don't think there's any reason to be concerned.

FW: Did you ask him about his appearance or his apparent fatigue?

SW: No, considering there was nothing unusual in his demeanor. He spoke in the same tone as always. And since there was no alarming information I assumed that whatever the reason for his appearance it was none of my business or he would have told me. Did you ask?

FW: No, and for the same reason.

SW: It does make one wonder though doesn't it?

FW: I try not to worry.

SW: That's best I suppose, so long as the information is reliable.

FW: Precisely.

The scene continues before them. They are completely passive before it, too lost in their thoughts to notice.

FW: So, will I see you here next week?

SW: Oh yes, of course. If you see him between now and then will you let me know or tell one of the others?

FW: Certainly. As soon as I know anything I'll pass word. I hope to see you in the shops.

SW: Not likely. I can't stand it. I let Jonathan do that.

FW: How is he?

SW: Fine, fine. The same.

FW: Tell him I said hello.

SW: I will.

Without ever looking directly at FW or saying goodbye, SW turns and walks away. FW continues staring forward absent-mindedly. She begins humming a tune in a low voice.

FADE OUT

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Jake Berry is a poet, a musician, and a visual artist. He is the author of *Brambu Drezi*, *Species of Abandoned Light*, *Drafts of the Sorcery*, *Genesis Suicide* and numerous other books. He has been an active member of the global arts and literary community for more than 25 years. His poems, fiction, essays, reviews and other writings have been published widely in both print and electronic mediums. In 2010, Lavender Ink released a collaborative book, *Cyclones In High Northern Latitudes*, with poet Jeffrey Side and with drawings by Rich Curtis, and Otoliths released *Outside Voices: An Email Correspondence* (also with Jeffrey Side). He regularly records and performs his musical compositions solo and with the groups Bare Knuckles, The Ascension Brothers and The Strindbergs. *Wilderness and Grace*, his ninth solo album, was released in 2012. Ongoing projects include book four of *Brambu Drezi*, a collection of short poems, and a wide range of musical projects.

Art by Jake Berry.

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taxis de pasa logos

