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## Places

### Title

Etching

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# Etching

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Now, cast corrosive thought across the ruined Forum:  
illuminate; impress the retina; lift; frame—

Caesar appears, on his knees, climbing a long flight. Rumor  
hisses around him; his face, daubed crimson, god's mask, offers  
no expression. The Capitoline stairs are steep; forty  
elephants, holding torches, light the way. Aromatic  
smoke fills their huge brain cases with the careful grass-fires  
set in Africa, to drive all animals toward Rome.  
All Rome looks on, nervous, considering. Above the Forum,  
at the top of Caesar's stairs, a tusked pig drums  
its trotters on travertine, and bristles, and shifts with fear,  
and shits, knowing, as the white ox and the white ram  
may not, what's coming. In the Mamertine Prison below the Forum,  
the foreign king Vercingetorix knows, too; they'll murder him  
here, at the moment of the sacrifice. He thinks of his far  
fame, pacing through excrement and torchlight caroming  
the close walls, the flicking grillework on the tufa floor.  
He hears trumpeting. His feet have carried him from  
Celtic Gaul, chained behind a cart whose blue wheel rim  
his iris is, now, encircling the dark oak forests  
and alder marshes of Gaul, where he and Caesar dreamed  
each other, circling. Who returns, Triumphator?  
The axletree sheared on the car carrying Caesar to the Forum  
today, an omen so terrible, so fraught with future, Rome  
holds still. Caesar atones, ascends now on his knees before  
the gods and the citizens of Rome. There is no room  
for maneuver, now—

Nor ever, but this straight form,  
this snail-track, etching the light or the plate or the pure sphere  
of the eye, where there are no such things now, in the Roman Forum.