

*Not You*

dead faces and witch eyes and homemade arm tattoos and illegible backpatches and frayed black denim and hoodie sleeves with the elbows torn out and patched-and-repatched coat elbows and carhartt doubleknees and tripleseamed duck jackets and huge carhartt hoodies with the bronze zippers and their t-shirts were darkened with filth and traingrease and muddy water so dark they looked dyed brown and green and black gauged rings and horns in their earlobes and necklaces of castoff talismanic objects who lived in a hammernailed shack in the ranchlands or a tarp lean-to in the presidio bluffs and someone tagged “shelley” and someone tagged “william blake” and “ornithopter wings” and one night in august I was drinking a forty at some bonfire and justin said that lord byron wrote lots of text about love and death and beauty and then in his thirties he actually went and fought in the greek revolution and then he actually died fighting in the war, and then there was a little silence as the fire embers vortexed and disappeared and I looked at justin and he was already looking at me and held my black eyes for a second with his grey ones and they watered and flashed with fire shadows and then he turned away and a few nights later somewhere in west oakland I lay awake in my coats and thought about our little songs and footsteps in the presidio dirt and the few ashes left in the fire circle that would soon be washed away by the rain and the stone eyes we found in the jungle carefully arranged and had they been stacked by travelers a few weeks ago probably but there was some tiny chance that justin was right and some kids had built them up decades ago and his designs on the bluffs in tied branches and rocks could last that long too into the black tunnel of the coming years and I searched out julie in the warehouse dark and cried against her and she woke up and held me with warm hands on my back and arms and tangled up in my long hair.

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then my goal became to trap the afternoon in my fingers and cradle him there like a pigeon with a snapped wing and I would tattoo it on my legs with india ink and on the backs of my forearms watching in our closet mirror the cloud shadows gliding over san francisco faster than birds on the coastwinds and the sunlight was orange and gold and flared between the skyscrapers onto the apartment buildings and the mosque tower and the cathedral buttresses and the yellow iron crane poised over the long green hill in the distance standing silent and unmoving with unbroken sky behind it.

san francisco was a rusted out steamvalve corroded and orange and crowned with a windowed cylinder with a pointed top like a circus tent and windows to the shadowed inside that yawned like battery alcoves in the presidio yawned black and open like the thin alleys of the mission their black iron gates crushed with tags and postal stickers and whole paintings above in full color with demon faces and cartoons of seahags technical and defiant against the grey walls blinking indifference to the paint rollers and droopy nods to the daytime wanderers and blackbook dreamers and at night softened and quietly you’re not alone who slept in hoodies or sat lookout on the cold sidewalks with the broken glass and marker caps and plastic bags and writing even on the curbs and asphalt like crumbling stonewalls of the cell in château d’if above the crashing black waves and screams of flashing seabirds in the night storms.