

The Prophet of Potrero Hill  
-- *San Francisco*

Remember the gargoyle carved in a gate post  
that shimmering afternoon our mushroom tea  
tasted like woody soup? Its weathered frown  
guarded a yellow Victorian atop Potrero Hill.  
After our slow-motion thigh-burning climb,  
we were amazed by this prophet on a fence  
with splintered eyes and tiny tusks in its beard.  
Remember what it said? “Kiss me, graduates,  
so you may lead a long and surprising life.”

You'd rented a floor-through with a Jacuzzi  
and a gay landlord upstairs who greeted us  
in new camel boots and ironed white T-shirt.  
“Mi casa es su casa,” he told you. “Whatever you need  
—spices, laundry soap, condoms—just knock.”  
He jacked up the speaker volume and surprised me,  
a middle-aged man lip-syncing Talking Heads,  
“This ain't no party, this ain't no disco. . .”  
For air guitar he swung his arm like a hammer.

“A producer,” you whispered. “He sells Quaaludes  
to Emerson, Lake & Palmer.” He'd discounted you  
a synthesizer to compose your first album. He told us  
to hike up the hill. “The views are fantastic on shrooms.”  
Yet we stopped in the yard, enchanted by an old bathtub,  
half-sunk in weeds, half-filled as a sunflower planter.  
“How psychedelic,” we agreed. “How Frank Zappa.”  
We'd photograph it for your album cover, maybe  
my novel. A philosophy major, I had serious plans.

Out on the curb we sat to admire the concrete army  
of skyscrapers downtown. “What a view for an earthquake,”  
you said. “We'd see San Francisco topple into the Bay,  
like, from the front row.” We vowed to meet here again,  
no matter where our lives might take us, to watch  
the catastrophe on mushroom tea. Twenty years later,  
I've learned this city won't tumble so easily,  
yet friendships vanish without a word.

The thigh-burning hill I climb this morning  
still has Victorians, VWs, parked wheels  
turned into curbs. But where is the gargoyle  
with cracked eyes and sun-warmed wooden lips?  
Remember what it promised? How silly,

kissing a gate post. How sad, not to do it again.