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## Initiation

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## INITIATION

*Yerba Buena (San Francisco-to-be), August 1846:  
Subject to municipal hazing, like all newcomers of note,  
Brannan is bid Find the Flag.*

Guffawing townsmen swathe his eyes  
in sackcloth, spin him dumb, and shove, send him  
careening through the Plaza's stagnant pool.  
That brine-sumped stink everywhere's just the brimmed  
Bay, ripe for progress, so he'll play their fool—  
seems it begins like this, ambition's trick  
way in—and in he wades, game for the hoots,  
knowing the brackish seepage, every slip,  
the stuff of profit, even leaked through boots.  
But blinded, sopping, lost, doesn't it seem  
the damn earth curves more than before, and spins?  
Doesn't this place feel vast? It's a frontier  
where we've all bellowed *Marco* for a grip  
on the next It, and chortling rifferaff cheer  
each lurch, wild but resourceful, of this big  
blindfolded cad, for the grander the veer  
and dumbfuck swagger, the surer the in.

49

So when one punch-drunk lunge goes wide  
and fingers finally graze flagpole, such roars  
rise up, such raucous kinship: Brannan's found  
the crucial place, high spangle, and he knows  
enough to close his hold. Huzzahs resound,  
send him swinging around, flinging the rogue  
grin, brandishing one dripping fist. He's in, now—  
one wet, canny embrace and Brannan's go  
is passed. The men rush him with bear hugs, crowd  
in, free his eyes, all surest civics riled  
up rowdy, rich, bighearted by the mud-

soaked triumph. As such savvy is the rite  
behind many a rise, this slapstick trudge,  
call out for drink! you rasp-rough rascals; sky  
the soaked hero to shoulders, to the pub  
for bubbly all around: Salute the blind  
boon, fool or bluff. However the man's won  
still flies.