

Absent, Without Leave

I remember little about San Francisco:  
a bitter smell of almond, the Chinese signatures  
left by suicides in The Mission, women pierced  
with silver, and a beautiful  
one-legged woman named  
Anne, her steel crutches pounding  
the cement of my upper-Haight neighborhood.  
We would watch  
her behind the safe curtains  
of our maniacally pastel townhouses,  
quite sure that she knew we were there,  
men turned willingly into amateur voyeurs  
by the sight of that freely-swinging stump.

We had to take to escape plans  
through the solitary pleasures  
of accidents and pain. We, too, all had vital  
things missing: a mature understanding  
of aging and decay; Ohio's landscape;  
rational reasons to get out  
of bed on Sunday. But James,  
my roommate, loved her the best.  
~~But~~ <sup>No</sup> mattered how much he sweated  
as he fled south on 101 on his BMW 1000  
he always came back the same--  
the missing ceased to be real.

His mother, a schoolteacher for thirty years  
near Youngstown, lately has been too tired  
to deal with the three-hour delay. The world's smaller,  
more limping, but no one knows how to tell her.

(Cont.)

("Absent," cont., no break)

Nine months each year she tries to give birth  
to children  
who can calculate vast algebraic formulas  
in borrowed languages, blissful  
and blind to the lack in their lives.  
James inhabits the reverse. He stays  
in the garage, a tool in each hand,  
his motorcycle boots glistening from oil.

He overhears that Anne  
has arranged affairs with less uptight  
guys, rich white kids from San Jose,  
each coming back to Haight Ashbury with lust  
where once their blue eyes shone, all of them  
taught firsthand to be less certain  
that the fires won't spread north  
and about the deathtrap desires  
that come from everyone's shared  
asymmetrical slippings.

JBC: A bit rough drafty, but thought you should scan  
it + probe for metrical lapses and Sonoma clichés — ending  
could be cleaner + clearer, but Dave keeps walking around  
in underwear: Calvins!!!? Chasing a Canadian masseuse  
named Harriet who looks like a earth motherly Laverne, or  
Shirley (the dark one) but has hands of steel, like Piggy or  
Squiggly, or Roberto Duran. It's so hot here the squirrels look like  
Cuban pimps. Viva la puta! Dink signed for 6,000,000,000 dollars  
with Capital: look for release late Sept/early Oct. They rock.  
Sometimes I'm so sad - Nebraska looks hale + hearty to me. Keep  
on programming - some day you can work for Dave + own Park  
Ave co-op and have your own private pair of hands. Love + peace,  
JBC