

Searching for San Francisco

San Francisco is a matriarch
laced into a vermillion corset that rusts
into the Pacific faster than painters
can cover her up. She quivers.
She pirouettes. She sings falsetto.
She languishes on a huge green slab
of serpentinite to metamorphose
before our very eyes.

I. Diminished Capacity

You don't get to be a fag hag with clout
in this city until you've danced in a crowd
at the Moby Dick and cackled
like Joan Rivers when a queen explains
why your shoe soles are sticky.
"It's all that dried semen, honey."

Coming of age here is a stroll
down the happy trail dotted with
peace, love, and men
the spittin' image of Tina Turner and Cher.
It smells like Djarum cloves
and tastes like Caramel Latte
and wonton soup
and pesto pizza
and Double Rainbow
Tutti Frutti ice cream.

Among ten thousand souls
at the annual vigil,
slim candles burn in waxy cups
to keep the bay breeze from snuffing
them out like the lives of Harvey Milk
and Mayor Moscone. It's been 8 years
but it's yesterday tonight.

Even in fury there is humor.
Approach City from valley.
A chipper billboard welcomes:
"San Francisco - Home of Twinkies"
and we all laugh ironically because here
you can get away with double homicide
if you eat enough Hostess snack cakes
and at least one of your victims is gay.

And this - in the beckoning city where
manicured lawns and pastel houses
of a vast neighborhood pulse
with show tunes and swaying hips.
And men hold hands with men
and kiss! Kiss each other in the light of day!
A beautiful vacuum, this "Boy
in the Plastic Bubble" world of how it should be.
Everyone's free and loves freely.
I'm free to be that fag hag secretary
on the N Judah line, reading
Stephen King novels and wondering,
openly, who I am.

There is dancing
to George Michael and Duran Duran
in clubs where lights bounce
off mirror balls and swirl
like a square dancer's skirt.
But don't be fooled.
It's also Black Flag seared
industrial pierced guitar riffs
and coffee so long on the stove
its stink sticks to nasal cavities
like gum on a flip flop.

While drag queens do hang out
on the yellow brick road at nightfall,
Tina's smeared her lipstick
and Cher's got a run in her stocking.

That's what evolution is.
You walk through the door of your life
with guileless eyes and a heart
as open as a window in springtime.
The cumulus clouds, jolly
and puffy Pillsbury Doughboys,
part to reveal the truth --
it's not lollipops and rainbows.
A shadow cannot be ignored.
It follows every living, dying thing.
And something, somewhere, is burning.

II. Word Processing

Meanwhile, back at the injustice factory
on a hostile planet in the final frontier
machinery hums in the garret
on the 20th floor. The computer
hard drive has a corner office
in a room as cold as a Frigidaire.

We hunch in our cubicles
like Klingons in transport shuttles
typing 120 words per minute
(faster than lawyers can read).
The 3rd year associates froth like rabid Romulans
all over the carpeted hallways
and tap their mercurial watches.

They are important.
They speak directly to the lord
our corporate terminator
who'll one day rule the universe.
We are their minions.
We type. We type. We type.

Tasha Yar unplugs herself
from the collective and snatches
the paperback off my desk.

“Why are you here? Why? Why?”

The question mark a Sharpie
crease on her forehead.

I don't know what she means,
but when I look away,
my hardback 1st edition of *Misery* is replaced
by a well-worn copy
of *The Running Man* and a note:
“You will not be assimilated.”

But tonight we are shackled
to our cubbies. There is always more
to type. To type. To type.
It's what we do. It's who we are.
Dammit in distress.

Our fingers light as feather dusters
make 76,400 words per day x 10.
There are always more words.
Unlovely complaints
and run on sentences squawk
through our Dictaphones.
Jargon dense business defense
thieving intellectual property
wearing sinister grins.

We are the red-shirted extras
engineered with Data fingers.
At the stroke of midnight
our uniforms dissolve.
Our cuffs release
and we unplug to leave
the hundreds of thousands of words
as processed as American cheese
scattered across conference room
floors. Those words
that have nothing to do with us.

III. Fingers

Baby gangstas
packin and fearless.
Blood only figurative
on their hands.
No choice
second time out of juvie.
Got to learn a trade.
Teach's hand bent and gnarled.
Stumps where ring
and pinky shoulda been.
Always raw.
Miss Zelda's fingers
are the lesson.
She says she remember
blood and it sound like
somebody else
screamin where are my fingers
where are my fingers.
Some guy name Dave picked em
up outta the dust for her.

She lines up the wood.
They never take their eyes
off those fingers
and wince a little
when she flips the switch.

This why you keep
your hands out the way
of a blade as fast, as whirring,
as destructive as your own life.

IV. Enemy at the Gate

The MUNI squeals to a halt
on the corner of Haight and Masonic.

I roll over in bed to stare through
the bamboo blinds at a skeleton man
asleep on the knoll beyond the bus.

San Francisco rests on a serpentine boulder
with veins of silica cutting through.
My geology professor taught us
of her subterranean beginnings,
how pressure and plate tectonics
force her up along fault lines.

I have a test tomorrow on rocks. One roommate
is burning patchouli while the other smokes weed.

It's not 1967 it's 1987, the 20th anniversary
of the Summer of Love which is something
we can't possibly know anything about
but we pretend we do,
though free love has lost its way.
It's all condoms and blood tests
And long lists of exes
and talk of the holy grail that is monogamy.

The men of my city, I watch them fall
like brick houses in an earthquake, like cards
in the deck stacked against them.
Thin as paper blown by a wheezing breeze,
their faces hollowed out
and covered with thin purple skin.
The President of the United States --
code name: Tomas de Torquemada --
runs the 20th Century version of the Inquisition.

Uninvited as Dan White's pistol,
the killer sneaks through bedroom windows
and steamy bathhouses.
Invisible as scarlet fever,
present in the most intimate acts.
A serial assassin sanctioned by

Grand Inquisitor Ronald McDonald Reagan.
His hit man cuts bloody swaths from our culture.
People die like poisoned rats
while he sits on a throne with his puffy cheeks
and Hollywood smile and won't say the word.

He's a busy hero consumed with the liberation
of seven American hostages
by talking Israeli Jews into selling weapons
to Muslims so Ollie North can train
Contra rebels to secretly kill all the Sandinistas
while 21,000 American lives end before their time.

Bitterness is a copout and rage a hindrance
but Pollyanna's got no business in this City.
Will we just lay there and bleed
anguish in silence instead of Acting Up?
Silence equals death! Action equals life!
Yet how much yelling are we willing to do?

The serpentine rock reminds us, if we let it,
that everything changes while seeming
to stay the same. Push history under,
let her lie, watch her rust away,
bury her underground, deep, into the rock,
beneath it, down, down, down, and wait,
wait for it, for the plates to meet on the fault line,
for the earthquake that comes, the big one,
the one that takes all of this down.

V. (r)Evolution

See that Hare Krishna on the corner
of 16th St. and the Mission lands.
She can smell the ancient yum
of Taqueria Pancho Villa's
lardy beans behind now
boarded windows. Flutter by.
Hear the snap fizz of a cap
escape the Negra Modelo bottle
to the tune of *Canta no Llores*.
This was long time ago
when you were a caterpillar
dangling from a plywood splinter
unready to weave the chrysalis.
The transmogrification
will not be televised.
You must be willing.
Impromptu kirtan of Krishna
consciousness is your dharma.
Spin. You must spin.