

Still Life in Black and White

Secondly, I remember her one-legged father
putting his Creole fist
through the backdoor glass,
asking me why, why his daughter,
his couch, and what kind of white man
would be a slave to possibility,
and my air-tight defense
freezing over,
like a winter stream:
there has been an accident.

Thirdly, I remember her slim, careful sister,
soon-to-be optimistic daughter
and doctor, bored
with my teen-age plans
of permanence,
Child-raising parent to-be
of autumn motorcycle wrecks.
She was the literal-minded solution
and source of cash and plans--
for this was 1972
and abortions and futures
were harder to talk about.

Mostly I remember her, the artist
as assassin, the beautiful hostess
of Zeroville, Ohio, at once the hero

(cont)

("Still Life," cont., no break)

and the double agent target, chewing
a limb off and still
that slow lizard death. Things
didn't work out in the city.
A priest partial to lost causes
forgave her and the trickles
of blood as her two brothers
stood watch over the patched door.

I hadn't done a thing. No,
not me: I was only guilty
of illegally transporting hope
through desire and the blue gunpowder
of unwanted breezes that held me,
drunken oarsman, to land:
high school, that dusty pacifier,
and then college, then work,
and then a silent, self-forgetful marriage.
I have had it all but still
pizza now tastes like her pizza,
The Azores will always be hot,
the Arctic cold,
and I'll be forever the balding,
fleeing spy, the unwelcomed one
at Mass, a Euro-trash dupe
mourning that which I never saw,
or could have, or will.