

Michael Baker

I Could Read History Books, But Women Stagger So Easily

For Allison Krause's sister, Laurel

You said, "Allison, Kent State," I said, "No, the wine,"  
and when your voice broke I opened the shutters,  
imagining the shots and tear-gas fading.  
Outside the college's may revive you  
but inside we raise glasses and talk of Mao,  
draw maps on the pillow cases, couple hands  
and concentrate on clock ticks,  
on the red sheets' shallow graves  
where only your fingers fit. Two more  
bottles and we will speak to the dead.

It's late so we turn down the Clash  
and see Allison and the others fall  
absolutely asleep, their lives tilted  
by the Cuyahoga's lifting waters.  
Our dominoed sleep becomes clotted  
with green uniforms and upraised guns.  
Some students coil near the Victory Bell  
and others bend under the elm's broken arms  
as friends fall, shielding red dirt.  
Now each morning gravel dust clings  
to young girls staring out dorm windows,  
thirsting for boxes of bones,

(Cont.)

("I Could," cont., no break)

rooms without views, sports bars,  
and the asphalt reminds them  
that there is more outside than in,  
with or without flannel camisoles on.  
Later, history will suck, lunch  
will be worse, and the showers crowded.

It's easier in my morning: tea and gin,  
pointless painting, and no job or labor.  
Laurel, don't drive or drift away--  
it's that time again and you're in pain,  
and you'll slip into familiar patterns,  
seeking photos, eyewitnesses,  
and thankful that someone who likes crack  
and riddles is around. It's raining.  
Let my tongue knit your eyes closed,  
now and always, so that I can begin  
to lay my wavering claims,  
because I understand May at times:  
don't you dream that your breasts  
may re-rise someday? But not in Ohio.  
The media begins to phone, you have  
to catch a plane to the end of the world,  
and you move your white hands  
through your breakfast only to see

(Cont.)

("I Could," cont., no break)

Allison look away, get shot in the back,  
falling into the spring grass,  
ghosts holding her smooth skin:  
hands now each night in someone's arms.